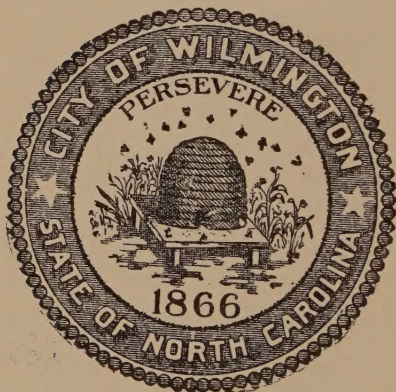


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MacIVOR'S FOLLY

MacIVOR'S FOLLY

By HUGH MACNAIR KAHLER
and DONALD GRANT HERRING



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I

A THIN, aromatic haze clouded the spaces between the scrub oaks with a pearling mist and spiced the air with a fragrance remotely pleasant—a smell that made Jane Borden think wistfully of autumn afternoons on Long Island, of early wood-fires burning cleanly in wide hearths. She enjoyed it with a hint of melancholy; they were burning leaves somewhere, she told herself: winter would be closing in soon. She gave the restless mare her head, as if to outrun the thought.

Already the ride had carried her well beyond the limits of her earlier explorations in this brown, desolate sandhill country. The barren monotony of the landscape seemed to urge her on, as if some welcome contrast must be waiting for her beyond each of the successive rises which showed their straggling profiles of stunted, scattered scrub against a gray-blue

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sky, and the careless, winding lanes had led her beyond any sense of location; she relied on the mare to find the way home when she was ready, and rode on, drifting through a vaguely unfriendly chain of little thoughts, her mood colored by the country.

She woke suddenly to a consciousness of the thickening haze. It stung her eyes now; the mild fragrance had become, all at once, an acrid smell that hurt her nostrils and tightened something in her throat. The mare seemingly liked it less than Jane; she flung her head nervously, snorted and trembled. Jane emerged from a blur of unwelcome reflection to a reality still less pleasing. Stories of forest fires came back to her with a sudden terrifying force; the smoke had followed her stealthily, like a sly, hungry beast, until it was near enough to spring.

Fear was a novelty in itself. Jane Borden could not remember ever having felt as she felt now, and the realization that she was afraid helped to clear her mind; panic was an affair of fools. She had read, with a contemptuous pity, of people who went suddenly mad in an emergency, and the thought that she could be as witless spurred into wakefulness a pride of intellect.

The fire couldn't be very near, or she would see or hear it; there must be time to ride around it. She remembered that the fatal blunder would be to run before it: the wind was perceptibly rising and touched, now, with an admonitory warmth; the smoke thickened quickly as she reined in the mare and tried to think. Faraway noises came to her, a succession of faint, popping sounds, like distant gunfire. Terror swooped down on her; she fought it back, clinging tightly to her self-control as to an only chance of escape. She forced herself to reason; it might be better, after all, to run before the flames on the chance of finding a stream or a clearing.

Plainly the mare agreed. It needed no touch of the spur to send her at a gallop along the rutted sand of the lane. As the road lifted to the crest of another low ridge, Jane felt the hot wind more distinctly. Beyond, where the path dipped toward a branch with its evergreen margin of thorn and creeper, the air was cooler and cleaner, and she thought of people in stories who had saved their lives by cowering in some little stream till the flames had passed. Again she hesitated; farther on there might be no better chance than this brook; she rose

in her stirrups, twisting in the saddle to look behind her, and the mare, as if aware of her lessened attention, chose the moment for a desperate leap forward. A low branch seemed to thrust out like an arm and snatch Jane from the saddle. She found herself ankle-deep in the boggy leaf mold beside the branch, staring through the smoke that had swallowed the horse. Fear lay on her now like a tangible thing, so that she lifted her arms as if to throw off a suffocating weight. The snap and crack of the fire behind her was suddenly near and dreadful, urging her forward into the little stream. It was barely deep enough to cover her feet; she realized that there was no safety in it, plunged across to the farther bank, running clumsily in her riding boots.

The smoke was thick and hot as she came to the crest of the next rise; she choked and strangled and her eyes closed obstinately against the fumes. She stumbled on blindly, one arm over her eyes, breathing, when she must, through the sleeve of her coat, crashing into the thin, hostile scrub, scarcely feeling the slash and whip of low, brittle branches that tried to catch and hold her back, intent on closing her brain against the paralysis of fear.

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Impersonally, a part of her intelligence seemed to stand back and ridicule her. This desperate struggle was a mere gesture, with no one to see and applaud; the end of it was visible and sure. She was on hands and knees, now, crawling before a dancing fire that leaped and chuckled and sang behind her. It was all silly, all a part of the folly that had brought her into this wilderness, had tempted her to this ride, had given the mare that chance to unseat her. All silly and all futile; she might as well—

A voice came to her, a deep, clear, carrying hail through the smoke. She tried to answer, but her tormented lungs could only cough and strangle. She scrambled toward the sound, sobbing. The fire was very close, now. She could feel the hot breath of it on her neck. Again the shout reached her, nearer now; she could hear a crashing in the dry wood; through the smoke she saw dimly a figure running toward her. She managed to lift her arms.

“All right. I see you.”

She crouched, her arms over her face, a great wave of relief rising in her. It was queer, she thought, that she should take it for granted, as if this man could keep that fire from harming her.

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After all—fear came back to her as he stood beside her. What could he do? Carry her faster than the fire? Wasn't he trapped, as she was?

"Didn't you have a match?"

He spoke as if in reproof; for a moment the tone and word seemed like an idiot jest. A match! With the world burning up behind her! She could hear herself laughing unsteadily as she saw him stoop and cup his hands about a tiny flame, saw the tinder-dry tuft of wire grass blaze up at her feet, watched him spread the flame swiftly in a wide swath before them. She cried out.

"Oh, don't! Now it's on both sides of us—"

He did not answer. A great roaring rank of flames fled away across the grass. Behind them, terribly close, another line of fire ran up, a narrowing island of safety between.

"Oh, why did you do that?" She wrung her hands. "We had a chance—"

"Don't talk." He pulled her abruptly to her feet. "You're safe now."

She was too spent to resist. He half carried her in the path of the fire he had set. The dry grass had gone in a brief puffing flare, like an explosion, leaving the bare sand powdered with a gray, fine

ash. Here and there a dead scrub-oak had caught fire and blazed on, but the menace was gone; the roaring blaze outfooted them, raced on before, eating a path where they could safely follow. She understood, now; fire was the only thing that could fight fire, just as the old catchword had it. The sober truth of the mouth-worn phrase came home to her as she glanced back in time to see a wave of angry flame sweep up behind them and die down, as if some great hand had fallen on it.

"I beg your pardon—I didn't understand."

"Don't talk." His voice was abrupt, as with authority, touched, she felt, with a grave rebuke. His grip on her arm urged her forward over the hot sand toward the fire that danced away from them, now, like a merry, playful thing, as if it had never meant harm to anybody. She saw it vanish suddenly, die out as quickly as the pursuing blaze had died, in a dwindling glow of scattered ember. The smoke lifted and thinned. Above the song of the fire which had overtaken them on either side, she could hear faraway shouts, mellow, musical voices. The man stopped short, rubbing a sleeve across his eyes.

"You will be safe, now. We have backfired here.

Follow the lane to the house. They will give you care there."

She was displeased with herself for a mild resentment. The man had saved her life; it didn't matter if he spoke ungraciously.

"It was lucky you happened to see me." She chose the first words that offered. He frowned, and she paused, puzzled at the sudden sternness of his face. It made her think of an old print that had hung in her grandfather's study—Cromwell, wasn't it, or Hampden? There was the same effect of flint in this man's face.

"It was not luck that I was there. I saw your horse when it crossed our backfire and knew that the rider might be afoot before the flame. I went on to search and found you."

She wondered at a deepening irritation. She was almost angry.

"It was lucky, wasn't it, that you should see the mare, and think of her rider? If you hadn't—"

"I do not give it the name of luck." His mouth went grim. Again she thought of the man who had cut off a king's head. "You'd best go on to the house. My aunt will care for you."

"I—I'm sorry if anything I've said offends you."

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She kept her obligation before her. "I didn't mean—"

"There has been no offense." He nodded stiffly. "Your way is yonder. I must be at my work. This fire is not in hand."

She saw him striding away over the scorched earth, a long, lean, straight figure in worn corduroy. He did not look back. She watched him till a break in the level hid him, and then, aware again that she was spent with fright and struggle, walked on in the line he had pointed. Suddenly she stopped short, staring across the clearing that opened before her. Her breath went deep, and she remembered the strange, keen pang that had tightened her throat when she had first seen a mass of men in uniform, halted and motionless on a wide drill ground.

They were like an army, she thought, those great, still straight trees that drew a line across the horizon as if on some precise parade. After the desolate monotony of the bunchgrass wastes and the leafless, spindling scrub, the sight of these old pines was arresting, incredible. From where she stood Jane Borden could see that unbroken battle-front for what seemed an endless distance, drawn straight across the gentle rise and fall of the bare land

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before her as far as her eyes could reach, the close mass of lofty foliage, high in the air, a deep, dense blue-black against the hazy sky.

She stood and stared at them, hardly conscious of the shouts in the scrub behind her, of the dulling noise of the fire. The forest drew her toward it; she plodded through the sand of a farm-road that crossed the clearing between ordered ranks of low, flat fruit trees, their bare branches red and lustrous, trees that seemed absurd distortions unworthy of the name, with those high pines beyond them.

The lane led into the high wood, twisting about between the great brown boles. A thick covering of fallen needles carpeted the wide, clean spaces, clear of undergrowth. Thin layers of diluted smoke hung in the shadow, and the sound of the wind in the branches had the somber majesty of distant surf and something, too, of its mystery. Jane Borden had an uneasy sense of intrusion, as if she had come unbidden into the remote and guarded sanctuary of some ancient faith.

The mood was still upon her when she emerged on a little clearing in a shallow valley, where a stream fed a low tangle of evergreen vines and shrubs. She saw a low, foursquare house of weath-

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ered wood below twin sycamores, their white and naked limbs ghostly against the background of the pines and the green creeper that hugged their trunks. Around it were old shrubberies, pruned to dense clumps of leafage almost black above the naked, gleaming sand; enclosed in a low hedge of box she saw the winter wreckage of a flower garden. The house and the silvery-gray walls of the lesser buildings beyond it had the look of fixed and changeless things, as if they had been here always, and would always stand.

A woman came to the door. Jane saw that she was gray, though her face was smooth and pink and her body as straight as one of the pines. The girl stood for a moment, meeting the direct look of clear gray eyes. Then, without understanding why, she felt her lips relaxing in a smile. Here was a friend.

II

THE woman at the door turned abruptly and spoke in a tone of command, a voice so touched with authority that Jane Borden seemed to hear the snap of a whip in it.

"You Sallie! Carry hot water up to the west room."

She came toward Jane, walking briskly, her carriage somehow as eloquent of authority as her voice had been. Jane discovered a curious attitude of compliance in herself; she was reminded of the old nurse who had ruled her destinies till she was seven and whose word had been something more respectable than law.

"Come in." It was less an invitation than an order, but Jane felt the cordiality below the peremptory tone and smiled as she moved forward.

"My horse was frightened by the fire and threw me," she began. "A man over there—" she gestured toward the fireline behind— "told me to come here."

"That would be Davie MacIvor." The head

moved in a remarkable gesture in which Jane seemed to read amusement and irritation and a sort of esoteric apology. "It would be like him to *send* you." There was a deep scorn in the word. "A great, lean, sober body, was it? That's Davie, then." The lips pressed grimly shut. "Come in." The tone warmed and softened. "You'll be the better for soap and water and a comb and glass."

Beneath her weariness Jane was amused and drawn. No one had spoken to her thus since old Meggie had gone home to Scotland. She liked the sense of protection in the strong arm which went about her, and yielded to it gratefully. They went in.

The architecture interested her in spite of her fatigue—a low, wide-roofed gallery connected two sections of the house; she guessed that the kitchen was at one end and the living quarters at the other. The door opened on a long, low-ceiled room finished in unpainted wood instead of plaster, a straight stairway ascending one wall. A great fireplace of rough stone dominated one end and an open cupboard of china and glass stood against the side wall; there was a square table of some dark wood and Windsor chairs of the same material stood by it.

She found an effect of intentional, studied austerity, rather than poverty in the simplicity and meagerness of the room and its furnishings. They had the look of usage and utility which made her aware of a decorative value completely wanting in the exotic comforts of the hunting lodge she had left—was it only a matter of hours since? Here was a house in perfect harmony with its setting, she thought, in better taste than her own.

A fat negress appeared on the stairs, a shapeless bundle of gingham, a scarlet cloth tied over her head, a great tin water-can in her hand. She showed white teeth by way of greeting, her face a net of tiny radiating lines.

“Done carried up the water, Miss Ailie.”

Jane liked the voice and slurred consonants of the speech. It wasn't at all like the dialect of story-books or of the stage. Already the Northern-bred antipathy toward the race had begun to lessen in her; these backwoods negroes were appealing, utterly unlike the impersonal, mechanical servants she had known.

The stair reminded Jane that she was very tired; the woman's arm about her was a welcome support, and she dropped wearily into the single chair be-

side the four-poster, surrendering more and more to the dominant personality of the other. She heard the grateful sound of water splashing into the basin; felt a sensuous pleasure in the touch of the warm, wet cloth deftly applied to her face and hands. Again, more vividly, she remembered old Meggie and the nursery at home. It occurred to her that she had grown up very suddenly, had missed old Meggie more than she had known.

It was natural, somehow, to let this woman help her off with the riding boots, to accept the suggestion of a rest between the linen sheets, to drop almost instantly asleep while the descending steps still sounded on the bare treads of the stair.

She woke to a gentle dusk, amazingly refreshed in spite of surviving aches and stiffness, aware of an edged hunger and a sharp curiosity about this place and people. Her clothes, cleansed and pressed, were on the chair. As she dressed, her earlier impression of the room gained force; again she felt the intention below its bareness, the effect of a stern avoidance of the unessential. This, after all, she thought, was the sound index of what people called good taste—the limitation of furnishing and gear to need and use. Here it went deeper, she decided,

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as she looked more closely. She had seen such beds in antique shops; the highboy and the mirror and the chair were the sort of thing for which collectors squabbled at auction sales. She had no great knowledge of furniture as an art, but she recognized in these simple fittings a dignity and charm somehow associated only with the craftsmanship of an older, simpler age.

From the stair she saw that the table had been laid for supper, old china and plain silver on the bare wood. The man who had found her in the scrub stood before the stone hearth, erect and grave and still, his glance meeting hers directly and with no touch of self-consciousness.

"Have you rested?" His voice was even, and the question, she felt, was no idle gesture of shallow courtesy but an honest inquiry. He wanted to know.

"Oh, splendidly, thanks." She tried to make her answer match his tone. The word, with its intrinsic exaggeration, displeased her ear. She should have said, she thought, no more than that she had rested well. "I haven't begun to thank you for—"

He interrupted calmly. "You owe me no thanks." It was not, she felt, the insincere disclaimer of

false politeness. "I did only what any man must do, given the guidance that I had."

She was dimly aware of something like reproof, and puzzled by it.

"You have had a merciful escape," he went on slowly. "There is no great danger in our grass fires for those who know their ways, but to a stranger they can be deadly." His tone changed. "We have caught your mare. She has taken no harm."

Jane Borden had a reluctant feeling that he disliked her, disapproved of her, that this sober courtesy covered distrust, at least. It was absurd, of course. The opinion of a backwoods farmer mattered nothing to her, even though she lay under a heavy debt to him. A faint regret responded to the thought; it was too bad, she felt, that she had not been rescued by a man more sensible of the privilege—Sheppard Gail, for instance. She smiled at the contrast between the two men, near neighbors, both products of the same soil and surroundings.

"You are Miss Borden, I think." His voice interrupted her thought. "I remember your father. He was my father's friend—a good man." He paused briefly. "I am David MacIvor; you have

spoken with my aunt, Miss Drummond. This house is hers."

She bowed in mechanical acknowledgment of the introduction. It was odd that he should claim friendship with her father, she thought. Robert Borden had been little given to easy intimacies. She remembered him but vaguely—a man perpetually submerged in affairs, kind to the little girl whose presence in his house had never seemed to be a major consideration. As a substitute her uncle Warren Borden had found a ready favor with the ten-year-old orphan; a jolly, companionable uncle, who had no dignity above games of parchesi on the floor and boisterous rough-and-tumble in the snow.

"I barely remember him myself," she said, rather to end an awkward pause than to inform him. "He must have had a queer fancy for this country. I mean it was odd, his caring for it as he did. He was so absorbed in his business that I can hardly picture him as liking anything else."

"He saw farther than most—your father." MacIvor spoke slowly. "He believed in this country. If he had lived—"

She found herself following this thought. If Robert Borden had lived his daughter would not

be reduced to exile in a barren waste of sand and scrub oak, with no better future before her. His brother Warren had been a better playmate than he, but no fit husband for Robert Borden's estate. If her father had survived, there would be something more than the hunting-camp and a bundle of worthless stocks and bonds.

"Yes," she said. "It would have made a difference."

Miss Ailie came in briskly from the gallery. "You've rested well," she declared, her glance approvingly on the girl's face. "You'll be ready for your supper now." She looked at MacIvor, her lips tightening.

"Davie MacIvor, did I or did I not say you were to wear your other coat? What manners are these for your father's son, with a lady to supper and all?"

Jane smiled at the uneasy look in the man's strong face. He wore an expression which carried her back to her nursery days when old Meggie had chidden her for stains on her pinafores.

"I forget, Aunt Ailie. I'll go change."

"You'll not. You'll keep us waiting no minute more for our food. You'll take your supper as

you are and serve you right." She gestured peremptorily at the table, and he drew back her chair with a simple deference which somehow gave Jane Borden an impression of a courtesy that went deeper than the superficial gestures to which she was best accustomed. All this, she thought, was very real, very true. She liked the way her own chair was drawn back in turn.

"Say grace, Davie MacIvor—a short one." Miss Drummond stressed the adjective. Jane bowed, concealing the twitch at her lips. MacIvor prayed briefly, using a simple Saxon speech that was even homelier, stranger to the girl's ear, than the idiom of his lighter talk. It occurred to Jane Borden that she had not heard a blessing over a meal since old Meggie had gone home. It was rather good to hear one, now; to find people who still believed in God, like Meggie. . . .

Her hunger surprised her, and her relish for the plain food which the old negress set before her—hot bread and a great dish of moistened corn-meal; slices of broiled ham, honey, marmalade and coffee. She ate without persuasion. There was little talk, as if these people came to the table for a single purpose and gave it a single attention. Again she

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was pleased; it was real, this honest, undisguised hunger.

MacIvor looked up from his plate. "I sent a boy to carry word that you were safe. I will ride back with you, if you have finished your supper."

Something drew the girl's eye to Miss Drummond's face. It was grim; the gray eyes regarded her nephew with a disfavor more eloquent than speech. Jane rose.

"I've quite finished, thanks. I'm ready now."

Miss Drummond came to her feet. For the first time Jane became aware of her dress—a stiff and creaking black silk, with a touch of old lace at the throat. It was strange that she hadn't noticed it before; she could not remember what Miss Drummond had been wearing in the afternoon. One didn't notice this woman's dress, she thought; no matter what she wore, she was Miss Drummond. "She goes all the way through," Jane told herself as she took her leave of the old lady with a genuine warmth. MacIvor, who had gone out to order the horses, appeared at the door.

"We'd best start now, Miss Borden. It's a weary ride by the shortest line—a good six miles at the least of it."

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There was an indescribable sound from his aunt, and Jane saw again the grim contempt of the mouth. Miss Drumond kissed her cheek.

"You can trust him to find you the road, my dearie," said the significant voice. "He knows that much, the great—*gumph!*"

Beyond the pines, across the clearing where the low trees were silver-gray in a thin moon-shot dusk, scattered glints of yellow light glowed where the old stumps burned on in the trail of the fire and the air was flavored with an acid smell of resin. Jane thought, with a reviving fear, of her stumbling flight before the racing flames; she owed this big, awkward man her life, and she had barely thanked him. She spoke abruptly.

"I don't know how to tell you that I'm grateful, Mr. MacIvor—if you hadn't found me—"

"You owe no thanks to me," he said bluntly.

"But I do. My life is rather valuable—to me." She laughed softly. "If you hadn't happened to—"

"We see that differently, Miss Borden. I have no belief in what is called chance."

She understood and was a little pleased that he left it at this. He clung, she saw, to a faith like old Meggie's in a God who marked the sparrow's

fall and whose hand pulled the invisible strings that moved his human puppets and governed every natural phenomenon, but he did not preach at her about it. It was a restraint she had not found in other pious people; most of them seemed to feel that piety relieved them of all respect for any conflicting philosophy.

Riding between the fruit trees through the smoke-stained twilight, she had a sense of slipping back through time to another age. This man was no modern; he belonged back with Cromwell's psalm-singing regiments who backed their faith with dogged blows, who could hold their tongues. She tried to hold hers, and could not; her life had been cast among those to whom silence was at once an affront and a reproach, who spoke for the sheer word's sake. Against her will she asked an idle question.

"What are these trees?"

She was not curious. It was no more than old habit, a courteous pretense of interest in something that might concern MacIvor. He startled her by a sudden loquacity.

"Peaches. They're in their fourth year now, no more! Show me the soil and climate that will grow

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trees like these in four seasons! And they call our land a desert!" He laughed shortly. "A desert—when it has made a forest like that bit that I have saved, and can make an orchard like this one that you see! MacIvor's Folly, they call it! Folly—" he stopped abruptly. "You will think them right if I go on. Yonder is the short road to your house."

She did not press the topic. It was better to let sleeping hobbies lie, she had discovered.

"It's safe to cross the burned land so soon?"

"Yes." He nodded. "There is no danger now. The fire has passed and till the grass has grown again and withered, there is nothing for fire to feed on. We burn over a safety belt each year to protect the pines."

He let the talk end. They rode on between the blackened, twisted limbs of the scrub in a silence that oppressed and challenged Jane Borden and prompted her, at last, to another triviality of speech.

"Mr. Gail didn't warn me against fires. If he had, I might have waited for him to ride with me," she said. "You know him, I suppose."

"Yes. I know him." She caught an underkey. He seemed to bite off the last word.

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"I didn't expect to find anybody like him in a place like this. He's interesting, isn't he?"

"Some find him so, I think." Again he gave the effect of leaving more unsaid than spoken. It was manifest that he disliked Sheppard Gail, but it was even more evident that he had no intention of saying so.

"You and he—you're not friends, then?"

"I have few friends, Miss Borden." He turned the talk and held it stubbornly to the frequency of grass fires in the cut-over lands, to the destruction of plant-food which they caused, and, when she suffered it, fell silent again. In this fashion they came at last to the fork of three roads which she knew was near the lodge.

As they turned into the path toward the camp the sound of hoofs came to them from the converging road. Jane was mildly relieved when Sheppard Gail's pleasant, drawling voice greeted her.

"Thought I'd ride over and see how you all were making out, Miss Borden. Who's that—hello, Dave! Never reckoned I'd catch you riding out with a lady."

"I was bringing Miss Borden home." MacIvor spoke grimly. "I will turn here, now, if you per-

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mit, Miss Borden. Gail will see you to the camp, no doubt, and I have a long ride still before me."

There was no mistaking the rebuff to Gail's good-natured greeting, and Jane Borden was annoyed at the forthrightness of the tone. MacIvor disliked Gail—it was natural that he should, she thought—but that did not excuse this sort of rudeness, which became, in her presence, almost an affront to her.

"Oh, you must come all the way, Mr. MacIvor. My uncle will want to thank you—"

"There is no need of that," he cut in quietly. "I have far to ride and a hard day behind me, Miss Borden. I'd best turn back at once. Good night."

"Oh—" she was honestly hurt, now, and angry. "I mustn't insist, then. I've trespassed too far on your kindness as it is, I'm afraid. Thank you, and good night."

MacIvor turned his horse abruptly without more speech. Gail called a cheerful good night after him, but there was no response.

Gail chuckled. "Poor old Dave! He wasn't meaning to act rude, Miss Borden. He don't know any better. A chance to ride home with a lady and he only knows it's a long ways!"

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She laughed sharply. "Mr. MacIvor doesn't believe in luck, I think."

"No." Gail chuckled again. "And that's how a man gets when he don't believe in it—and don't play it for all it's worth. Don't get down on old Dave, Miss Borden. There's a lot of good stuff in him, but the manners got left plumb out."

III

“**I** TOLD you not to ride alone, didn’t I?”

Warren Borden moved his feet with an effect of irritation, as if to put an end to an argument he found displeasing. Jane shrugged her shoulders. Her uncle’s temperament had changed, she thought, since the final disaster in his financial experiments. He seemed less interested in the narrowness of her escape than in its confirmation of his previous warnings. All through her tale of the adventure he had displayed a mounting impatience. He turned to Sheppard Gail before she could answer.

“Well, Gail—what’s this nonsense about selling the railroad for junk? I got your circular—”

Gail spread his hands. “I wish it was nonsense, Mr. Borden. But what else can we do with the thing? Every time we run a train it burns another hole in somebody’s pocket. The road hasn’t earned a cent since we got through hauling the timber, and it won’t ever earn anything, now the timber’s gone.”

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Borden frowned, and for a moment Jane had a helpless sense of an impending scene. She knew that her uncle thought the condition of the Dundee and Deep Creek Railroad the result of mismanagement, and that he held Sheppard Gail chiefly responsible for this. In the old days Warren Borden would have been incapable of rudeness, whatever the provocation, but since this latest and worst catastrophe, his temper seemed to have suffered with his health. He wasn't well, she thought, and he had the irritability of both failure and illness to excuse his lapses in courtesy, but she found them, sometimes, hard to forgive.

"Nonsense!" He spoke fretfully. "The trouble with you people, Gail, is that you expect traffic to walk up and knock on your door. You can't run a railroad on that basis any more—you've got to get out and make business, and then hustle to keep it. You tap a great big country with this line of yours; there's no reason why it shouldn't pay and pay well, with the right management."

Gail chuckled good-naturedly. "I'd like to think so, Mr. Borden. I hold about as much of the stock as you do, I reckon. But if there's any freight in this country, it's mighty well hid up. We made

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good money till the timber was all cut, but there's nothing left that I can see."

Jane looked up. "But there's lots of timber left, surely? I saw—why, there must be miles of it, and only a little way from here. Mr. MacIvor's house is right in the finest pine forest—"

Gail laughed again. "MacIvor's Folly? That doesn't count. When Dave MacIvor owns a tree it isn't timber—it's just a tree. He won't sell a stick for love nor money. Dave's got a funny kind of a head. I reckon you might have noticed it, Miss Borden."

Borden straightened. "There is some standing timber, then? How much does this man control?"

"All that's left. He owns clear back to the swamps over in Cray County. Reckon there must be a good many thousand acres, but you don't know MacIvor, Mr. Borden. With him owning that timber, it's the same as if it wasn't there. He's got a notion in his head—"

Borden laughed sharply. "I should think he had more than a notion there! He's the only one about here with sense enough to hold his timber till it was worth something! You sold yours pretty cheap, didn't you? There was never much market

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for this long-leaf stuff till the white pine was almost gone. What did you get?"

Again Gail spread his hands. "I'm bound to admit they didn't overpay us for it. We made more out of hauling it than out of selling it, I reckon. But Dave MacIvor isn't holding out for money. He don't care for that part of it. You don't know him, Mr. Borden."

"I'm going to know him, very soon. He sounds to me like business." His tone quickened. "I knew there was money in this road, if somebody got out and went after it right. All it needs is a little management. Gail, before we sell the rails for junk we'll haul that timber. This man MacIvor is worth coming down to meet."

Jane saw Sheppard Gail's thin, dark face tighten ever so little, and glanced apprehensively at her uncle. It was hard to believe that Warren Borden could be so careless of a guest's feelings. Gail kept his temper admirably, but she saw that it cost him a sensible effort.

"You may be right, Mr. Borden. I reckon we aren't as keen, maybe, as you folks up north. But if you think Dave MacIvor is going to sell his timber, you're on a right cold scent. Folks don't call

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his woods MacIvor's Folly just for fun. No, sir. Dave's been holding that timber a long time, when it meant that he had to work like a nigger in his corn and cotton, instead of rolling in money that was his for the taking. Why, Dave'd make money both ways—he owns a right pretty slice of the road himself. His daddy and mine put up most of the money to build it. No, sir—Dave won't sell." He laughed. "It's the same as religion with him. You don't understand."

"I understand a man who had sense enough to hold standing timber instead of cutting it for a dollar or two a thousand feet!" Borden spoke impatiently. "Of course he doesn't say so, but there's no reason as good as a dollar to a Scotchman, and he certainly sounds Scotch."

"Yes, sir. He's Scotch, sure enough. There's a sight of that kind in this country—came over after the '45 rebellion, mostly, and stayed right where they stopped. But—I better tell you. It's partly spite, with Dave. He hates us Gails, and he'd go hungry any time if it would keep us from eating too. It goes back to the time the road was built. You see our land lay in closer to the main line than MacIvor's, and naturally the road got to

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us first, so we cut and hauled our timber before old MacIvor got a chance. He claimed we didn't use him right, keeping him waiting. That started it. Dave holds the grudge yet."

Borden grunted. "That's the most absurd notion I ever heard! A man going hungry himself to spite somebody over a quarrel between dead men! I tell you, Gail, I'm going to get that timber on the market. You'll see!"

"I hope you will, sir. It'd suit me. But there's more to it than you see. Dave's religious—you never knew a man that took it like he does. And—well, when the lumber gangs were in here, it was right wild times. MacIvor claims he'd rather leave his timber rot than bring them back. And there's the liquor matter, too—he's hot against it, and we don't look at it like that. And since he got the notion 't he can raise peaches in the sandhill country, he's been kind of crazy about hanging on to his pines. It don't sound like sense, but you'll see, when you talk to him. Won't he, Miss Borden?"

Jane smiled. "I don't think anybody will have an easy time persuading that man to change his mind," she agreed. "But it does sound impossible

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—the way you put it, Mr. Gail. People were like that two or three hundred years ago, perhaps, but surely—”

“You wait and see what MacIvor says.” Gail rose. “Wish you’d come over to-morrow evening, and ride with us. We’d ought to have a good run. Hounds meet at the mill dam. We most generally find a fox there.”

He shook hands with a touch of ceremony, as if the mention of his pack of hounds inspired him with a sudden sense of the dignity befitting the M. F. H. of the Sandhills Hunt. Jane liked this. The sandhill wilderness had more than one point of resemblance, she thought, to the old world that had slipped into the history books. MacIvor and Gail were both figures out of a past.

She listened inattentively to her uncle’s comment on the talk. It was odd, she thought, that men who had consistently failed at every business operation they undertook, seemed to acquire with each reverse a more unshakable faith in their commercial sagacity. Warren Borden spoke as if he had only to wave his hand to make this run-down country blossom into dividends.

“Have we any money at all, Uncle Warren?”

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She cut into a sounding period, following her own train of thought. He started.

"Eh? What's that? Why, of course! We've got my income—it's not much, but it'll keep us here, till we can make this turn and get away. And you own this place, and the railroad stock."

"I haven't anything else, then? It's all gone?"

He waved his hand. "Don't worry, Jane. It doesn't matter. You'll have plenty when I've jerked this road back on its feet as I'm going to do. And meanwhile, I've got enough for us both, and what's mine is yours."

She concealed a smile. As executor of Robert Borden's estate, her uncle had never been able to distinguish quite clearly between what was hers and what was his. The phrase said too much. She kissed him and went to her room.

He was still asleep when she finished her breakfast in the morning. She went out to the stable and superintended the saddling of her mare. There was nothing to do but ride, and her yesterday's adventure seemed only to impart a certain flavor of excitement to what had been dull sport. She was not afraid, now that she knew how to deal with fire in the grass. The box of safety matches in her

pocket protected her, and it lent only a pleasant tang of danger to a ride to know that these bleak slopes of dry grass and dwarfed oak might flame up behind her again.

She rode at random, keeping instinctively to the crest of a long, curving ridge which gave her occasional glimpses above its lesser neighbors—wide, monotonous sweeps of rolling country in which the gaunt and lonely pines, missed, here and there, by the lumbermen, drew together in the distance, so that sometimes there was almost the effect of a thin wood. Once, between two crowding shoulders of sandy hill, she saw the straight rank of standing timber that marked the edge of MacIvor's Folly, and she checked the mare while she filled her eyes with it. This whole country must have been like that, once. A vague sympathy toward MacIvor's attitude woke in her; no wonder he hated to tear away the woods and leave behind a niggard wilderness like this—Sheppard Gail's word for it came easily to mind—this sorry country!

She discovered that her view of David MacIvor had changed since yesterday. He had acquired a certain importance, now, as the owner of that timber; the talk last night had made her deferential

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toward the thought of it as so much potential wealth. Money—it was queer that it should matter so much more when it was gone than when one had it. She had never thought about it till the estate had gone to pieces in her uncle's hands; now it needed an effort to keep the topic from her mind. It irritated her to find that the knowledge of MacIvor's holdings colored her view of him. Yesterday he had been a rather impolite farmer to whom, almost resentfully, she owed her life; to-day, simply because she knew he was richer, potentially at least, than she had ever been, he became a figure of very real importance. She wondered if poverty affected everybody like this; perhaps it was only those who had been used to wealth who missed it, who were self-conscious about it.

She set her teeth on a resolve. Misfortune shouldn't make her like that; money didn't matter, really. All philosophies agreed on this. Sheppard Gail, for instance, with his empty pockets, his shabby riding clothes, his forlornly beautiful old house and his stable of home-bred hunters, was unspeakably better off than David MacIvor, with all those square miles of virgin pine. Gail got something out of life; that was what counted—to make

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existence pay you a price in the coin you chose for every minute you surrendered. Gail was alive; an hour of his eagerness behind the foxhounds was worth a year of dullness at the tail of a plow. She thought of MacIvor, his grim face lighting at the talk of his peach trees, boasting of the sterile sand as if it were alive and part of him. And again she contrasted him with Sheppard Gail, alone in that decaying house among the cedars, living in a disorder of littered pipes and crops and bits, worn volumes of Surtees and scattered sporting magazines, taking his troubles as gayly as he took the fences he built so carefully across his favorite runs.

There was something splendid in accepting poverty like that. It seemed to rebuke her own discontent. The Gails had been rich; the last of them was dog-poor, as he called it, without being sorry for himself, without letting it make him over into a fretful, hurrying striver. It didn't even affect his attitude toward MacIvor. He spoke of him, she remembered, with a sort of good-natured tolerance, almost as he talked about the negroes whose talk he could imitate so perfectly. It wouldn't occur to Sheppard Gail to think more of David MacIvor because he was rich and Gail was poor. She was

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shamed by the realization that she did exactly that.

Not that she liked or admired the man the more, now that she knew of his wealth. Rather the discovery heightened her impatience, gave edge to a kind of annoyed contempt, but there was no denying that the money lent him an importance in her sight which, till last night's talk, he had not found. Perhaps it was because Warren Borden had spoken of a chance to make his timber serve their interest; he was important, now, because their future depended in some measure on his attitude toward his own.

The ridge slanted steeply down to a sudden hollow, where a thicket of holly and evergreen thorn and creeper wound like a long, lazy snake through the brown waste of scrub and wire grass. A hint of moisture rose in the dry air of the upland and Jane's lips felt a sudden thirst. As the mare lowered her weight delicately down the slope, Jane caught the whimper of a hidden stream, stealthy and furtive; she seemed to feel on her cheek a boundary line between the warmth of the higher levels and the damp coolness of the bottom. The smells changed, too; here were keen, insidious odors of winter-flowering vines, of damp moss and leaf mold and wet earth.

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The mare slid between two holly bushes and paused on a strip of bright, bare sand which flanked a shallow pool. She drank with long, satisfied noises, and the sound quickened the girl's own thirst. She dismounted and lay flat on the sand beside the horse; the water was amazingly cold. Jane lifted her head, her weight still supported on her hands. Lying so, with her face almost at the water's level, her eye caught a glint of foreign color in the undergrowth on the farther bank, a dull, gray-yellow tint that instantly challenged a curiosity quickened by the woods. She laughed at herself for the unbidden thought that it might be good to eat, whatever was hidden over there. You reverted quickly, she felt, if you went back to the woods in which your faraway progenitors had been at home.

She yielded to impulse, nevertheless, springing lightly to the other side, still holding the reins. The mare followed, shaking her bits in jingling protest as she splashed through the pool. Jane bent the inkberry bushes aside and leaned low.

Perhaps a score of large jugs, each corked with a corn-cob, were hidden under the leafage, and she spared a careless approval for the wit which had chosen the place. Except for the chance that had

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brought her eyes almost to the ground level she might have passed this way a hundred times and seen no sign of them. She guessed what they were, even before she drew one of the stoppers and recognized the sour, fermenting smell it released. Shepard Gail had talked jocularly about home-made whisky—the only profitable industry, he called it, left in Hewitt County. She chuckled at the memory of his story about the sheriff.

“Befo’ the state took an’ went dry,” he quoted the official as declaring on the stump, “I conside’d it my duty to limit the local production of co’n liquor to the needs of ou’h home consumption, but now, gentlemen, I feel like it was incumbent on Hewitt Country to he’p provide for ou’h sufferin’ brothehs in otheh communities where they’s less opportunity for still-runnin’.”

She replaced the cork, a little amused at this confirmation of what she had taken to be no more than an anecdote. Evidently illicit distilling was a commonplace affair, here, and not the romantic and dangerous pursuit of which she had read in high-colored fiction. She almost regretted this; it would have given a spice of adventure to the ride, something as real in its way as that of yesterday, if she

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could have imagined a desperate moonshiner to train a squirrel-rifle at her, or take her captive and carry her to some mountain cabin, as such things were done on the screen. As it was—she shrugged and straightened.

Her heart stumbled and raced as she looked into the eyes of a lean, hollow-cheeked man who stood watching her, motionless and strangely forbidding, against a background of thick shrub. There was no hostility in the level, unwavering glance or the straight, thin-lipped mouth, and yet she knew by instinct that this man was dangerous.

"I—I'm afraid I've found your jugs." She felt that unless she spoke she would scream. "I was getting a drink."

"Who might you be, ma'am?" He spoke almost without intonation, his voice high and thin, his eyes holding hers steadily.

"I'm Miss Borden. We have a camp over there." She gestured with her crop.

The eyes narrowed, their lower lids lifting in a kind of squint in which she felt hostility.

"What did you reckon you'd do about this here liquor?"

The question annoyed her in spite of her rising

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fears. The man was the one to offer explanations; he was the law-breaker. She lifted her chin.

"I hadn't meant to do anything about it. But I think this is my land, and I'd rather you moved it away at once."

"You aim to tell folks where you found it?"

Her anger rose. "I shall do as I think best about that. You must move it at once, in any case."

"I aim to. And I reckon I'll have time to git it away, too." He moved so quickly, after his quietude, that she was utterly off guard. The reins were twisted from her hand before she saw what he meant to do; he struck the mare sharply on the flank and Jane watched her plunge on, snorting, through the thicket.

"Thar. Reckon I'll have time enough, while you're a-walkin' home."

She blazed. "I'd have said nothing, if you hadn't done that. Now I shall certainly tell."

"Give you lief." He swung an arm in the direction the mare had taken. "By the time you git home, hit won't matter what you say. Better start. Hit's a right good ways."

She hesitated. She had no idea of the way home

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beyond a hazy recollection that it lay along the ridge. And in riding boots, through this sand—

She saw his eyes change, a new look in them, a look of fear, she thought. A moment later her ears, less sensitive than his, caught a faraway sound of hoof beats in a trotting tempo. He saw her head go up and her lungs fill for a cry, and was upon her like a cat, one hand over her mouth, an arm holding her helpless.

IV

FOR an instant there was no room in Jane Borden for any emotion except blank, unbelieving amazement. She had lived in a society in which physical violence, even between men, was outside of the possibilities. She had a sense, in that moment, of simple unreality. This thing could not possibly be happening to her. Then, quite suddenly, deep-buried reflexes moved in her. She seemed to be divided into completely distinct personalities; the Jane Borden she knew looked on, aghast and incredulous, at a catlike savage who squirmed and clawed; she had no part in whatever mental process prompted that unknown woman to sink her teeth deep in the calloused, unclean palm that pressed against them. It was not fear; she was aware only of a suffocating indignity to be resented and opposed at any cost and by any means.

She heard a startled oath with a note of pain in the tone; the hand moved and in that instant of freedom a voice she did not know lifted in a high, clear cry. Another hail answered; the sound of

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hoof beats came nearer through the undergrowth. She twisted, still in the man's grip, and looked up with a throb of triumph at the grim face of David MacIvor, sitting his great, rawboned white horse.

The picture printed itself deep on her brain; long afterward she could see it, distinct and vivid, as she saw it now—the height and power of the man, the ice-blue eyes, incurious, unangered, relentless.

She held her breath. The infinitesimal pause drew every nerve in her tight. She saw the moon-shiner's hand move to his hip. A sharp cry came from her lips; it seemed as if the sound lifted MacIvor from the saddle and in one lightning-swift motion flung him, like a missile, at the man on the ground.

She had read of men who fought with their hands; she saw it, now, for the first time and yet with that same persistent sense of familiarity which had been upon her from the beginning. She was not surprised nor sickened by the strange, terrible sound of flesh impacting upon flesh, the snarl of an oath, deep in a throat, like a dog's growl, the catch and hiss of straining breath. She had lived through this before; it was in the blood of her, an unsuspected heritage from skin-clad women who had been cause

and prize and witnesses of just such fights as this before the written record of the race began.

She heard her voice saying something in a husky, eager whisper, found herself poised and alert close to the locked and straining men, waiting her chance to strike. "Kill him! Kill him!" She could say it, mean it, help to do it, without even surprise!

The men were not badly matched. Except for the advantage of his plunge from above, MacIvor had no superiority in strength or courage. There was a lithe and feline agility in the moonshiner which offset the other's greater weight, but the momentum of that first leap served; it carried both to the ground, the moonshiner sprawling backward over his own jugs. On the wet earth they rolled and wrestled, striking each with one free hand while the others strove for possession of the gun which the moonshiner had just contrived to draw before that unyielding grip closed on his wrist.

Jane Borden saw her chance as they rolled within reach again. She stooped and seized the barrel of the gun, wrenched at it with a strength she had not known she owned.

"I've got the gun! I've got it!"

MacIvor instantly released the prisoned wrist and

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struck twice with his free left hand. The sound quivered in her ears, a noise at which the woman she had been an hour ago would have felt a sick disgust, at which, now, she heard herself laughing deep in her throat. The blows told. She saw the man relax and lie still, while MacIvor sat up, searching for another weapon. He found it—a long, wicked-looking knife, which he threw far into the bushes before he rose.

“Get up, Rufus Breck. You’ll do little more evil this day. Get up and go.”

The other man swayed to his feet, one hand nursing his jaw. There was blood on his bruised face and one eye had already swollen nearly shut.

“I’ll git you for this, MacIvor—git you to rights.”

MacIvor answered only with a gesture, a slight, strangely peremptory motion of his hand, backward from the wrist joint. The man called Breck obeyed it with no more words; a stumbling run carried him out of sight beyond the thicket. MacIvor turned deliberately to the girl and his eyes seemed suddenly to serve as mirror to a revived self-consciousness, so that she saw herself as if with his vision, her hair loose on her shoulders, her habit torn and mud-stained. She lifted her hand to her lips and

found them swollen and bruised and saw blood on the fingers.

He spoke gravely. "Are you hurt?"

The words cleared her mind instantly. Self-possession came back to her. She laughed.

"Not a bit, thanks. Are you?"

He shook his head silently. She twisted her hair swiftly into place, stooped to bathe her face in the pool, wondering a little at her want of embarrassment.

"This makes twice, Mr. MacIvor! It's getting to be a habit, I'm afraid. I mustn't say that it was lucky, must I?"

His face darkened. "It is not the word I should use in your place," he said evenly. "Though to do Rufus Breck but justice, you have been in no danger here. He would not have harmed you. He is bad enough, but not in that way, at his worst."

He turned abruptly, bending over the jugs. He drew the stoppers and poured the spirit into the branch. Methodically he lifted the empty jugs in pairs and smashed them together, a splinter of fragments flying about. Her curiosity was touched.

"You—are you a revenue officer, too?"

He turned to her. "If I were that, I should be

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careful not to see this liquor, instead of having spent my morning searching for it."

He swung to his saddle and with a grave inclination of his head urged the rawboned horse across the brook. She stared blankly after him. He was actually going to leave her! A glow of anger warmed her.

"Oh, please!" She bit back the words. She couldn't ask for what any man should have offered, insisted on giving. It would be more endurable to stumble home alone than to beg help of this man. She heard the sound of his passage through the lowland tangle, the snapping of twigs and a remote splash now and then as if he crossed and recrossed the stream. She stood listening while these noises all but died in the distance and then came toward her again. The white horse reappeared.

She controlled her resentment. However little she might like it, she must get her bearings, at least, before he left her.

"I'm afraid I'm lost," she said. "Can you tell me—"

"I will take you home when I have finished," he answered evenly, as one who deals with an unreasonable child. He rode past her down the stream

and again she listened to the diminishing sound of his passing, to the crescendo of the return. He drew rein before her.

"I cannot find it, after all." He shook his head. "And yet it must be near by."

She lifted her brows in question.

"The still," he explained. "There is small use in pouring out the liquor unless I find where it is brewed." His face darkened. "This man Breck has the skill of his master the devil at hiding his workshop. It is over a year now that he has sold whisky to my blacks. Twelve of them had jugs last night."

His tone had a quality that caught her attention. There was little heat in it, and yet an effect of anger that puzzled her; he seemed to resent in a personal sense the drunkenness of his negro laborers.

"I suppose they'll all drink when they can get it, won't they?" She spoke chiefly to end a pause. He dismounted deliberately without answering at once, and held out one arm in a gesture of something like command.

"You had best ride," he said slowly. "It is a matter of miles to the camp, and those boots are ill things to walk in."

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She could not hold back a smile at his simplicity. He seemed to think he needed an excuse for offering her his horse! She scrambled into the saddle unaided, and he adjusted the stirrup leathers mechanically. Standing close and below her he gave her time to inspect him at near range; she could not help noticing that he was closely shaven, that the mud stains of his late encounter were the more in evidence because of cleanliness below and about them. She was a little angry at herself for being pleased by this discovery that after a morning in the saddle even his hands were clean.

He walked beside her, his face visible in profile, the mouth set and grim. She studied him at leisure, still puzzled and displeased by her interest. It was he who broke the silence, this time.

"I am glad that you have come." She started. Coming from this man who conspicuously lacked the normal male instinct for compliment, it was an astounding speech. Sheppard Gail's florid expressions of delight had amused her; this blunt announcement had the effect of portentous declaration.

"Your land has been a source of much trouble, lying vacant and untended as it has. This man

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Breck has made use of it, I am all but sure. It will be different now."

She chuckled. "You think he'll be afraid of me and move away?" It was at herself that she laughed. She might have known that MacIvor would have some solid reason for anything that sounded like flattery. He shook his head.

"You hold a thousand acres, more or less. There is plenty of room on it for a hidden still, and ownerless land is safer, from Breck's viewpoint, than if it is occupied. He will no doubt move his still, now that you have come. Indeed I think he has already moved it."

"He seems to have moved his jugs, at least."

He nodded. "Yes. That is what I was thinking of." She saw his brows gather. "My negroes say that they did not pay for what he gave them last night—the jugs were left at their doors. He has done that same before. It is his way of affronting me."

"You seem to take a great interest in your people," she suggested. "Of course I suppose it's a nuisance to find them unfit for work, but—"

"It is more than that, with me, Miss Borden. The negro, as we come to know him here, at all

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events, is very childlike in his ways. I conceive that it is necessary to safeguard the blacks who live in my cabins—and I have eighty of them to watch over. I will no more have them poisoned than your friend Sheppard Gail would stand by while an enemy misused his dogs or horses. It is not alone that I like my blacks, but rather that a duty lies upon me.”

Jane Borden had the casual, Northern notion of the negro, a man and brother in theory and an outcast beast in practice. It shocked her to hear this man classify them with livestock and pets—his attitude offended her prejudice from both directions. It was bad enough to deny them equality as he did; it was far worse to imply a measure of personal affection toward them.

“I don’t like them,” she said. “I can’t understand how white people can have them in their houses—I can’t get used to the two we’ve got at the camp.”

“That is mere ignorance,” he said calmly. “You will learn better in time. It is only when he is poisoned with drink that a negro is a brute beast, such as they think him in your country. His self-rule is a little less established than a white man’s, I think, and alcohol dissolves it swiftly and alto-

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gether. These woods are safe enough for you to ride alone, except when men like Breck have been at work."

She sent a quick glance about her, almost of present apprehension. The thought came to her that even the straggling scrub-oak made effective cover. Bare as the country seemed, her eye penetrated only a hundred yards in any direction. She had ascribed Sheppard Gail's warnings against her solitary rides to his manifest anxiety to serve as escort. Now she gave them sober weight, felt, for the first time, a menace in the friendly wastes.

A shot jarred spitefully against the silence, a flat, angry noise, like the magnified crack of a whip-lash. She cried out, drawing rein, and as the horse paused, she saw MacIvor sway and stumble forward, saw him fall awkwardly, his arms outflung on the sand, a red stain spreading on his face.

JANE BORDEN'S cry seemed to reach her ear from far away; the horse shied and swerved under her, carrying her past the still figure on the ground. She heard a crashing sound of flight in the woods behind her, wheeled the plunging beast and slid from the saddle. She had seen blood before; once, at an ugly water-jump, she had seen death in as sudden guise as this; but she was faint with a loathing disgust as she bent over the sprawling figure on the reddening sand, with a horror as at something hideous and unclean. Murder, from ambush—for a moment she could not distinguish clearly between the deed and its victim. She had to force herself to her task, too hatefully stirred to have room, at first, for sympathy.

MacIvor had been shot from behind. She saw that the bullet had struck obliquely above the ear, tearing an ugly wound. She had been unreasonably certain that he was dead, and when she stooped and heard his breathing, it seemed an uncanny, affrighting thing. She felt clumsily for a pulse in the out-

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stretched arm and found it. In her chaotic thought the discovery seemed only to add a needless complication to her own problem. If he had been killed outright, she could have ridden at once to carry the news. Now, a divided duty confronted her; she must get help as quickly as she could, and yet, by staying, she might perhaps save MacIvor's life. The wound bled freely; he might die from loss of blood before she could find the camp and bring back aid.

Common sense decided her. She had no skill herself; it was best to ride on and leave the rest to chance. The word caught at her memory. This man did not believe in chance; she accepted an amendment as if he had insisted; let his God look after him, then. She flung herself into the saddle and urged the horse along the rough track at the best speed she dared. The twigs of the oaks reached out and whipped her face; the great beast stumbled heavily in the sand; she was not even sure of her way, choosing at random and hoping that she might come out on some familiar landmark. Chance again—the thing in which MacIvor had no faith!

She came at last upon a slanting pine which

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served as landmark. The camp was within a thousand yards of that gaunt, inclining trunk and at the sight of it she dug her heels into the horse's flanks. Chance had served her turn, at least, and MacIvor's, too, perhaps. He would have called it something else. It didn't matter.

Her uncle lounged in his wicker chair on the porch, a book on his knee, the inevitable glass at his elbow. He looked up, as she rode straight toward him, with his familiar air of amused resignation.

"Now what? Where did you find that Arab steed? Don't tell me you've been swapping horses."

A kind of anger flamed in her at this man who lived on the outer surface of things, declining to take life as anything more than a rather dull joke. She let the thought color her tone and phrase; she wanted to be brutally blunt.

"Mr. MacIvor's shot—I'm afraid he's killed. We'll have to hurry!"

It pleased her to see that the words startled him out of his detachment. He got to his feet with a spring, his mouth open, his eyes wide.

"MacIvor! Who shot him—where?"

"Call Latham—we'll need the cart to bring him

in." She slid to the ground. "Hurry—there's no time to talk now."

He was still too deliberate to suit her mood. She slipped past him to the house and ran to the kitchen wing, where Latham and his sullen wife, Johnanna, were at work. Her abrupt command seemed to paralyze the male; he showed yellow eyeballs, lifted unsteady, pink-palmed hands. It was the woman who displayed an adult quality in the emergency. She turned a lean, ominous countenance toward her mate.

"You, Latham! Di'n' you hear what Miss Jane say? Stan' like a calf! G'on out to 'uh stable an' git 'at wagon fo' I take an'—"

The threat hung in the air as Latham obeyed. Jane repressed a hysterical impulse to laugh, a little afraid of Johnanna. The woman's silent ill-humor contradicted her preconceived ideas of darky good-nature. Latham was far more like the negroes of the stage and page on which she had built her opinions of the race.

She followed him to the stables and, on impulse, adopted a hint from his wife's manner toward him. He leaped under the flick of her sharp command as if a whip had touched him. She remembered what

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MacIvor had said: they were like children. He was right, she thought, about Latham at least. Under orders he was effective; left to himself he would have needed half an hour to harness the draft horse to the light cart. As it was he accomplished it swiftly, so that he was backing the wagon from the open shed by the time Warren Borden appeared, leading MacIvor's horse.

Instinctively Jane kept command. At her bidding the two men climbed into the cart and she led the way on the saddle horse. She wondered why she should remember the path so clearly; she was never in doubt about it.

MacIvor lay as she had left him, and Warren Borden needed only a brief examination to reassure her chief anxiety. He had some little skill at make-shift medicine.

"It's a glancing wound," he announced. "There may be concussion, of course, but I don't think the skull's fractured." He wagged his head. "Half an inch to the left and it would be different. Lucky."

Again the girl thought of MacIvor's hostility toward that word. To him, probably, some divine interference had swerved the bullet just enough.

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She wondered why, in that case, it couldn't have been made to miss him altogether. Of course he wouldn't admit any such line of reasoning. People who held fast to set beliefs were careful never to pursue reflections that disagreed with them.

She helped lift the heavy, awkward burden to the bed of the cart, conscious of a reluctant compassion. MacIvor probably wouldn't want anybody to be sorry for him, she thought. There was no reason why she should feel as if it were her fault that he had been shot. She had no doubt that it had been Rufus Breck who had fired at him, but by his own statement he had been on Breck's track when he had rescued her. It was an old quarrel, in which her part had been only incidental. And yet—she found that she clung, unreasonably, to that sense of guilt, as she held the white horse to the crawling pace of the cart.

At the camp, when MacIvor had been carried to a bed on the ground floor, she overruled her uncle's suggestion that Latham ride to fetch the doctor from the village at the end of the rails. She wanted this errand for herself, as if it were a right and privilege.

MacIvor's horse, ungainly as it looked, had speed

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and a sure foot for the uncertain sand of the lanes, and she sent the big beast on at the best pace she dared. She was surprised, in spite of her impatience, when she rounded the curve of a low hill and emerged above the straggling settlement, a forlorn huddle of low, graceless buildings flanking both sides of the track in the naked, littered sand. The dominating structure was the station, a long, one-story shanty of unpainted pine, stained by the weather, propped on wooden stilts five feet above the rails and fringed by a rickety platform beneath which, as she cantered past, a few gaunt hounds uncurled themselves and barked distrustfully. A group of tatterdemalion negroes, sunning themselves against the station wall, slept on in spite of the tumult below them. She drew rein at the doorway of the store and post-office, meeting the incurious, squinting inspection of three lank, sun-bitten youths in faded jeans, who slouched and spat in the strip of shadow. She addressed them inclusively.

"Where does the doctor live?"

They exchanged looks, as if to determine which should assume the painful effort of speech, and all three spat again, meditatively, while the issue lay

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under cogitation. Before they reached a decision the storekeeper presented himself in the doorway, plainly a member of a higher social order, distinguished by collar and sleeve-garters and suspenders.

"Was you lookin' for Doctor MacLean, ma'am?" He shielded his eyes from the sun. "Anybody ailin'?"

"Yes." She sharpened her speech, annoyed at the delay. "Mr. MacIvor's been shot."

The audience received the intelligence with visible interest but with no display of excitement. Simultaneously the three youths spat. The storekeeper lowered his jaw.

"Dave MacIvor? Shot bad, ma'am?"

"I don't know. That's why I'm so anxious to find the doctor. If you'll point out his house—"

He gestured across the track at one of the two houses which had known paint. She stirred the horse with her heel, depressed at a thought of the sort of doctor who would be likely to live in such a place. But her first sight of Doctor MacLean reassured her. He was small and thin and old, and there was about him none of that prosperous assurance which she had come to associate with the

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expensive specialists of her experience, but she felt at once that he knew his work and followed it as much for love as for a living.

She told him very briefly what had happened. He rubbed his chin, his fingers making a scratching sound against the white bristles of a short beard.

"I'll ride right over, ma'am. Dave MacIvor's wrong-headed, some ways, but we ain't ready to lose him yet awhile, I reckon."

She waited while a lame negro saddled his horse. They rode past the store together and she observed that the three meditative youths had not moved. Somehow they seemed to personify the dreary dejection of the country, sterile and desolate and acquiescent. The old man riding beside her put her thought into words, as if she had spoken it aloud.

"It ain't all their fault, ma'am. They ain't bad boys. It's the way things stand that's to blame. They's no use for a man to work, the way cotton and tobacco been sellin' these two-three years. And the land ain't much good anyways. It's a right sorry country, now the timber's gone."

She nodded. Why didn't they get away from it, then? Surely if they had a grain of ambition

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they'd emigrate. Again he seemed to follow the thought.

"Right funny, how a man hates to move out'n the country where he belongs. I been meanin' to go ever since they stopped cuttin' the pines, and I ain't got round to it yet. It's sorry country, sure enough, but it gits so it don't look sorry till some stranger comes and makes you see it like it looks to him."

The horses plodded carefully down a slope in the trodden sand. The old man pursued his topic, his voice high and thin and faintly musical.

"One way, it's all Dave MacIvor's fault we're so bad off," he said. "You'd hardly believe how things has changed since he stopped them cuttin' the timber. The town was alive, those times—stores and saloons and a bank. It'd be like that again if Dave would sell his woods."

"Perhaps he will, now." She remembered her uncle's suggestion. Perhaps MacIvor, as he declared, had only been shrewd enough to wait his own time. "I understand that the price is very much higher than it used to be."

The doctor laughed. "That's so, ma'am, but it don't matter to Dave. Trees—he sets more store

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by a sorry old pine than by a human, any day. MacIvor's Folly won't be cut till Dave's dead."

She felt the undercurrent of bitterness in his thin, genial voice and could understand it, even share it a little. Her imagination lifted a sudden vision of this countryside in the height of the timber days, the roaring trade of the pine-board towns, the stream of yellow lumber going out and the thinner, yellower trickle of gold that flowed back. Tales of lumber camps woke in her memory, providing a background of contrast against which the languid, consenting stupor of the present found a new significance, indicting the man who lay unconscious at the camp as the single cause of all this decay. It lay at his door—the dead desolation of the town, the poverty and emptiness of the countryside, the effect on the dejected natives who had stayed. He was responsible, in a sense, for those three lank, lounging boys at the store; except for him they might have been busy, alert, prosperous.

The thought rode with her. If Gail spoke truly, it was all to gratify some private grudge and whim; if Warren Borden's conjecture was correct, it was to serve a private profit. Either way, MacIvor had starved and broken his country and his neighbors,

given them nothing in place of what he had withheld.

In this light he gained, somehow, in her opinion. At least he was a power, a man strong enough and hard enough to set his wish against the interest of a whole community, to face the consequences unafraid, selfish, no doubt, and narrow and stubborn as well, but owning, too, the rugged virtues of those defects.

They found him conscious when they reached the camp, but weak from loss of blood and still showing the effect of shock. Her first opinion of the doctor was confirmed by his deftness at his work. He dressed the wound swiftly.

"Reckon you better stay right here, Dave, till you get over the worst of it. They's no sign of concussion, but you've got a mean wound and you've bled a heap."

"I should go home," said MacIvor slowly. MacLean overruled the protest with an authority that sat strangely on his slight, reedy figure, and Jane noticed that his patient yielded the point at once.

"I must get word to my aunt, then." He spoke to her, looking past MacLean. She nodded.

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"I'll send Latham over at once. You mustn't think of trying to ride till Doctor MacLean says it's safe."

"I'll be over in the morning," said MacLean. "You stay where you are till then, anyhow."

Meeting her uncle's glance Jane Borden surprised a gleam of satisfaction in it and was puzzled. She had expected him to resent the intrusion, as he had resented, of late, everything that involved any personal inconvenience. He was plainly glad that MacIvor could not be moved at once. She wondered why.

The doctor slanted his head and studied Warren Borden as he stood beside his horse, ready to go back. He had declined an offer of refreshment, and his glance moved, now, to the glass and bottle on the porch table.

"You use liquor very much, Mr. Borden?"

Borden frowned. It was a point on which Jane had learned to keep silent. Any reference to his steady tipping irritated him at once.

"I never drink except when I can get it," he said shortly.

The doctor did not smile. "You wouldn't get it if you was a patient of mine, sir."

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Borden chuckled. "That's one reason I give you fellows plenty of room, doctor. If I'd believed everything they tell me, I'd have cashed in long ago."

The old man nodded slowly and climbed to the saddle. As he vanished at the bend in the land, Borden turned to the girl with an abrupt change of manner.

"Jane, this is unholy luck—this whole business! I've been getting a headache trying to figure out a way of putting that sour Scotchman under an obligation, and here he is—right where we want him."

She frowned, vaguely displeased at his tone. "I don't see—"

He made an impatient sound in his throat. "Oh, don't be dense, Jane! Don't you realize that this fellow controls the only money that's left in this hole? If we can manage him, it means getting the road back on its feet, money enough to get out of here and stay out. This is our chance."

Again she was repelled by the tone. It wasn't like him to count eagerly on turning his hospitality for profit. She had heard him air views of men who inveigled guests under their week-end roofs with a canny eye cocked toward the market.

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"We'd better wait till he's well, hadn't we?" She meant it as a gentle rebuke, but he took it as another sign of dullness.

"Nonsense! This is the very time to go after him. A man's always easier to handle when he's on his back." He stopped to fill the glass with whisky and water, and drank, his hand visibly tremulous. Her brows drew together. This home-made spirit that Sheppard Gail had brought him must be responsible for the change in him. But she knew that a protest would only anger him, and held her tongue.

Latham was despatched to carry word to Miss Drummond, and Johnanna, sullen and clumsy, waited on the lunch table. Warren Borden's spirits mounted steadily during the meal.

"I tell you, Jane, it's the luckiest thing that's happened for years—our coming down here! I just felt in my bones that there was a profit left in that old road! It takes a northerner to see it, that's all. A fellow like Gail would starve to death with a million right under his eye. I'll show them yet!"

VI

WARREN BORDEN talked himself into a mood of pure optimism; he would arrange the sale of the timber for this backwoods plutocrat and pick up a profit on the deal; the railroad would pay dividends for a year or two, and then be salable to investors who looked only at annual reports; they could go back to New York with full pockets.

"I'll go in and amuse him, now," he announced, emptying his glass. "There's no time like the present."

She was driven to open protest by this. "Uncle Warren! Don't you realize that he's ill? You can't mean to bother him with business when he's—"

His easy irritation flared at her. "See here, Jane, leave this to me, please! You don't seem to understand that it's no time to quibble."

"I can understand that Mr. MacIvor's our guest, and in no condition to be bothered with business."

"Pshaw! MacLean said it was nothing. He'll be up and about by to-morrow. You couldn't hurt

that fellow's head with a glancing shot! And you don't realize what this means to us, Jane. It's the last chance—if we don't find a way of unloading our Dundee stock, we'll stay right where we are till we die—till I die, I mean. We're living on the annuity my father bought for me, and if anything happens to me, that stops. Don't forget that. I'm not thinking about myself—it's you. You'd be stranded down here with nothing but a piece of bare sand and a waste-basket full of worthless paper. We can't afford to waste a chance like this—I've got to talk to that fellow when I can be sure he'll listen."

"I'd much prefer—"

He stopped her with an impatient gesture. "It doesn't matter what you think you'd prefer. It's my business to look out for you and I'm going to do it."

He turned away. A sense of helplessness came on her. The extent of the change in him revealed itself with an effect of shock. He had never been like this even at his worst. It had been swifter, more visible, this process of degeneration, since they had come to the camp, but she realized, now, that it had begun long before—a growing irritability,

a gradual relaxation of standards in speech and dress and conduct. She was afraid, not of him, but for him and for herself. His reference to her dependence on his annuity startled her; she saw herself left alone and penniless in this wilderness if he should die.

She followed him to MacIvor's room, led by an unfamiliar need of human contact to reassure her against this new fear. As she reached the open doorway she heard MacIvor's voice, clear and determined.

"Once for all, sir, I will not talk of cutting. I passed my word to my father that the timber should stand while I stood."

"Very proper attitude, too—very proper." She heard Borden's quick response. "I can understand exactly how you feel about that. But your father would certainly change his mind if he were here to-day. When he died, I take it, there was no real profit in this long-leaf pine of yours. Now it will bring—"

"I have no concern with that, sir. It was no greed of money that moved my father. He had seen enough—and I had seen enough. I will not kindle a new flame in the hell that was lighted in

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our hills in those days. You have not seen the timber towns, the men who fell the trees. I have. I will not bring them back."

She came into the room, hoping that her presence would end the talk, but her uncle seemed hardly aware that she was there. MacIvor greeted her with a slight motion of his head. She saw that his eyes were hard and bright.

"Oh, that!" Borden waved his hand. "Of course lumberjacks are apt to be a rough lot, but that surely isn't a reason for refusing to take the profit you've earned! They'll come and go, and there's an end of that."

"Yes. An end of more than that." MacIvor nodded slowly. "We will not agree on this, Mr. Borden. I say again that I will not sell—at any price or on any terms."

Borden's face went crimson. For an instant Jane feared an angry outburst, and she touched his arm in warning and reminder. He regained control of his irritation with a visible effort and something of his old manner was in his answer at last.

"Well, it's your affair, of course. I meant only to point out that conditions have changed—that you have a very large sum locked up in unproductive

timber ; but, as I say, it is your own affair and none of my business. I meant it kindly."

"And I take it so, sir." MacIvor moved his head again. Borden rose.

"I'll let you rest now. I'm afraid this has tired you."

"Yes." Jane intervened quickly. "I'm sure the doctor wouldn't want Mr. MacIvor to talk business just yet." She produced Miss Ailie's note and forced a diversion by reading it aloud.

"I told her it was just a scratch. I didn't want to frighten her."

"That was kindly thought of."

Borden sauntered out, maintaining his semblance of unconcern. She took the chair by the bedside.

"Would you like me to read or talk or would you rather try to sleep?" She spoke with a warmth prompted by her disapproval of her uncle's course.

"I think I could sleep," he said frankly. "You are very kind, Miss Borden. I am sorry that I must trouble you."

"I think I owed you more than this," she interrupted quickly. "It was in my quarrel, too, that you were hurt. You must remember that."

"My trouble with Breck is older," he said wear-

ily. "You must not blame yourself for any part of it."

She left him. Her uncle paced fretfully on the veranda, a deep groove between his brows.

"Did you hear him, Jane? The man's a fanatic! He won't cut his timber because lumbermen don't sing hymns while they work. Actually, that's his reason! And he owns I don't know how many square miles of virgin pine!"

"He's in pain and weak," she said quietly. "I'm sorry that you spoke to him about it. We can wait, certainly, till he's on his feet."

"There's no time to lose," he said. "Somebody else will get in on it if we don't. I've got to think, Jane. There's bound to be a way around this."

She watched him prepare to think by refilling his glass. Her attitude toward liquor had been always as tolerant as his, but she had, now, a quick sense of anger at the pale liquid in the bottle, almost a personal antipathy, as for a human enemy.

"I don't believe that stuff's good for you, Uncle Warren. You're drinking a lot of it, too."

He shook his head impatiently. "Oh, don't begin on that, Jane. It's first-rate whisky. Gail ages it, you see. Moonshine's just the same as any whisky

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except that it's usually sold before it's fit to drink. This is three years old, Gail says, and I believe him."

She knew better than to insist, and his emphasis a little reassured her. After all, he might be right. But her uneasiness continued as she watched him slouch in his chair and scowl above the glass. He was very different from the merry, irresponsible uncle who had been more like a jolly elder brother than a guardian. Again she confronted a displeased amazement that he should greedily insist on talking business with a reluctant and wounded guest. He was a man without a creed, but, like so many such men, he had been the slave of a code which made no exceptions. This thing he had done was more detestable, according to his old standards, than any sin would seem to a puritan.

It was a relief to see Sheppard Gail swing gracefully out of the saddle. He was a member of her own order, in spite of trivial differences of surface, the thing she thought of as a gentleman, with no definite formula behind the vague term. His presence in this backwoods lessened her growing sense of solitude, the feeling that she was alien and alone.

"What's this about Dave MacIvor being killed?"

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She felt a genuine solicitude in his tone. He didn't like MacIvor, perhaps, but he could be sorry to hear that he was hurt. She explained quickly, and saw with approval that he was honestly relieved.

"I've been looking for this," he said soberly. "Dave has been hunting trouble mighty hard. Rufe Breck isn't like the boys around here. He's from the hills, and it's risky business to meddle with him."

She related her own experience with the moon-shiner. His eyes went black and angry as he listened.

"Laid a hand on you, did he? That fixes him. We been leaving him alone but he'll go, now. I—"

She opened her eyes wide, pleased that graver offense was in his sight the less, that he was angrier at the affront to her than at the attack on MacIvor. He seemed to follow the thought, and laughed mildly at himself.

"I reckon that does look funny to you, maybe. You see, down here, we look at things different. A lady—" he stopped. "A fight's a fight, and Dave went hunting for this one. But mishandling you—" He shook his head. "Breck goes. I'll ride over to Tyre this evening and see the sheriff myself."

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Warren Borden looked thoughtful. "Sheriff a friend of yours, Gail?"

Gail smiled. "I wouldn't say just that. But he's apt to listen when I talk. If he didn't, there'd be another sheriff pretty soon, that would."

Borden chuckled. "You mean that, Gail? You pull as much influence as that?"

"You don't want to listen to me brag, do you, Mr. Borden?" Gail's pleasant grin apologized for even so much of a boast. "The county most generally goes our way, these times. It isn't a lot to be proud of, any more."

Borden's teeth showed for a moment. "I want to talk business with you, Gail. Jane won't mind. I've got a notion."

Jane liked the quick, deferential glance at her which prefaced Gail's assent. He didn't forget his manners, however Warren Borden might.

"I ought to see if my patient's all right, anyway." She left them on the veranda, her uncle in the act of filling his glass. MacIvor was asleep, his face touched with an added grimness below the bandages. He made her think again of the picture; one of Cromwell's Ironsides might have looked like this, after Naseby. Her thought moved to the men on the

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veranda. There was a cavalier, to match this puritan; she smiled a little; Sheppard Gail would have fitted easily into one of Rupert's regiments. And Jane Borden—? She would have been for the king, she decided.

She avoided the porch as the afternoon declined, uneasily curious that the talk there should last so long. Once or twice she heard Gail's pleasant laugh, touched with a new note of excitement. She changed for dinner. Although the habit had been dropped when they came here, Gail's presence seemed to call for and justify the formal usages which had seemed alien and ridiculous in the woods. She emerged on the porch feeling more herself. Gail's instant leap to his feet, his eager, instinctive gallantry, pleased her.

"We been wasting too much time on business, Mr. Borden." He had an undeniably appealing smile. "How's old Dave, Miss Borden?"

"Still asleep. You're staying for dinner, of course? Please do."

He hesitated. "I'd like to, thanks."

Borden seconded the invitation with his old cordiality and carried Gail off to his room. Jane noticed that the bottle on the stand was almost empty, and

when the two men joined her it was clear that her uncle had consumed more than his share. Gail was entirely at ease; Warren Borden, by contrast, seemed almost gross in his good humor. He laughed a little too loudly, his voice was high-pitched and overbearing; he referred mysteriously to a surprise in store for Jane, to his own shrewdness, to Gail's enlistment in some endeavor which he chose not to explain.

"There's a kick in the old horse yet, Janie. You'll see! I knew there was money waiting for us down here. Sixth sense and all that." He wagged his head at Gail. "Shame on you—under your nose all the time, and you never smelled it!"

"The old hound for the cold scent," said Gail smoothly. "Don't rub it in, Mr. Borden." He turned easily to the girl. "I'd sure like for you to ride to our pack, Miss Borden—there's good sport with our native hounds. They want manners, but they have the nose."

She welcomed the change of topic and liked him for perceiving that she had had enough of her uncle's mysterious allusions to money. She observed approvingly that he barely touched his glass, and afterward, before the fatwood fire, declined to join War-

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ren Borden in his recourse to the refilled bottle. He kept the talk close to his foxhounds and his hunters, and she understood enough of the jargon to enjoy it. He had studied his hobby; she learned, for the first time, that even seemingly absurd trivialities of costume had their origin in common sense—the brilliant color of the huntsman's coat, the shape of the headgear, the pattern of boot, all had sound reason for existence. She discovered that he knew his Surtees almost by heart and that in a modest way he collected editions. The feeling that he was a survival from a forgotten age grew on her, with a kindred consciousness that they were of the same order. She liked him, and was glad that he had stayed, sorry that he took his leave so early.

Warren Borden dropped an unsteady arm about her shoulders when they were alone.

“Janie, old girl, I’ve got it, this time! I’m going to show them, yet.” He changed his tone abruptly. “I’m going to take care of you all right, Janie—you needn’t worry any more. You’ll be fixed, no matter what happens to me.” She detected a warning of coming sentimentality in the voice, and drew away. She had never seen him so visibly affected by his drink.

"You'd better turn in," she said gently. "You—you sound tired, Uncle Warren. I'll see that everything's all right."

He agreed with a startling readiness. "That's right—I am tired—dead tired, Janie. Tell you about it in the morning."

But in the morning he did not appear for breakfast, and after waiting long beyond the usual hour, she tapped on his door. He did not answer; she went in, to find him seemingly asleep. She could not rouse him. A sudden panic woke in her. She ran to MacIvor's room, afraid. He listened grimly.

"You say he finished a bottle of Gail's whisky yesterday?"

"I think he did."

"It may be no more than that, then. But MacLean will be here soon, and my aunt, too, if I know her." He met her eyes for a moment. "You need not fear, Miss Borden. This raw spirit is more powerful than the liquor your uncle has been used to."

She was a little comforted, in spite of a certain shame. According to the code under which she had lived, there was no disgrace in intoxication, provided

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a man bore it decently, and yet, under MacIvor's glance, she had a sense of humiliation. Even a puritan, she thought, had less respect for a weakling tippler than for a gentleman who carried his drink gayly and well.

When Doctor MacLean arrived she felt an instant comfort, a faith in him which seemed the stronger because he had so little of the professional air to which she was used in men of his calling. The deep, fluttering respirations which had alarmed her became now reassuring; there was a vigor about them that ridiculed her anxieties. She was startled by the doctor's tone.

"How long has he been like this?"

She told him all she knew. He rubbed the short bristles of his beard.

"Has he been under treatment, in the north, do you know? A special diet?"

She shook her head. "He wouldn't listen to what the doctors told him. He always ate what he pleased. He used to say that doctors only wanted to interfere with his comforts."

"I reckon they did." He spoke dryly. "Fond of sweet stuff, wasn't he? Liked a drink, too, eh?"

She nodded. "He took a great fancy to the whisky

they make down here. He's been taking a lot of it lately."

Again he nodded. "Thought so. It's too bad this didn't come while he was north. They could have done a mite for him, up there, maybe. Intravenous injection to alkalinize this here acidosis—but it looks to me like it would be too late, anyhow. This coma—"

"What is it, doctor? I don't understand."

He shrugged. "Only what happens when a man poisons himself for years. Diabetic coma, we call it. They isn't anything to do for it. He won't suffer, and that's some comfort."

She stood very still. "You mean he's going to die?"

"I hate to say so, but—"

"Thanks for being honest with me. I'd rather know now."

Her thought blurred. There was a helpless pity for the unconscious man she had loved; there was a glow of anger, too, at the folly that had brought him to this, as if he had committed slow suicide, almost intentionally, by criminal neglect. It was his own fault that he wouldn't live to carry out whatever plan he had devised last night.

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Her own plight came clearly before her in the train of this reflection. His income would die with him—there would be nothing for her. She was angry at herself for the thought and a penitent compassion welled in her; Warren Borden was dying, at fifty-four; she felt the presence of a gratuitous tragedy, a wasted, sterile life, foreshortened by the only pleasure it had held, cheap, trivial pleasures, too—mere sensory reactions to food and drink. It seemed suddenly horrible that a life should have held so little.

The doctor's hand touched her arm gently and, in a new, ominous silence, she listened in vain for that labored breath.

VII

LOOKING on death, Jane Borden wondered at herself. Always, when the thought had intruded on her mind, she had shrunk away from it, with a reminiscent terror bred of the two overshadowing tragedies of her childhood. She was puzzled and ashamed, now, to discover that there was in her little room for mere grief, that this catastrophe presented itself as a practical problem, involving difficulties and duties that dulled its emotional effect. Her mind faced immediate and commonplace considerations, rather than the sudden, incredible event that gave rise to them. She must think quickly and clearly, must somehow meet the situation in spite of the helplessness of which even in this first moment of shock she was dominantly conscious.

Warren Borden's income lay dead beside him; there would be no more quarterly remittances; she must decide whether to go north for the funeral; where and how she would live now that he was gone; she even drove her thought to repellent details.

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Doctor MacLean's gentle touch on her arm recalled her to the present.

"You can leave most of it to me, ma'am. Don't you fret about anything't I can do."

She thanked him silently. Again he touched her arm with that effect of reassurance.

"I got to look at Dave and then I'll ride over to Tyre and see to things. You'll be wanting to go back home, I reckon."

She shook her head with an abrupt decision. "No, I can't. It—it will have to be here. And—" she wondered again at the hardness of her tone— "and soon. To-morrow, if possible."

He nodded approvingly. "That's right, ma'am. That's the way to take it."

He led her out of the room with a gentle authority. She felt a suffocating need of the open, and went out swiftly to the brown-carpeted aisles below the group of pines that sheltered the camp. It was easier to face the thing here than under a roof; here death became a phase of that same natural process of which these great, still trees were a sign and part, a cleaner, less abhorrent thing than it had seemed in the close, darkened room.

The sound of wheels distracted her blurred medi-

tations. She saw a shabby, old-fashioned surrey in the lane, a dejected negro driving and behind him, erect and dominant, Miss Ailie Drummond. A great rush of thankfulness overwhelmed Jane at the sight of those straight, competent shoulders, that uncompromising countenance below the bleak black bonnet. She had a random, absurd thought that if Miss Ailie had been here, death wouldn't have dared to intrude without her consent. There was a grateful release, too, from a harassing consciousness of immediate and practical problems; Miss Drummond would know what exactly to do and would incontinently do it.

She found herself running to meet the surrey, like a child, heard herself crying out the story, a welcome sense of refuge strong upon her as Miss Drummond drew her into the carriage and slipped a firm arm about her.

She could cry, now; she could remember that Uncle Warren who had played parchesi on the nursery floor and taken her for sprints of matinees and ice cream, conspiring in whispers against old Meggie's discipline; could realize the dreadful emptiness of a world in which there was no man or woman of her blood.

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"There, dearie. It's what you needed most—give in to it. We women have the right of tears, thanks to the good God that left it us."

The voice healed and soothed, like the strength of the arm that held her. Abruptly the spasm of sobbing ceased; she sat up, herself again. It was a relief to explain. Miss Ailie nodded grimly.

"Men are made so," she declared. "The best of them wants the good wit to choose his food and drink with reason. It's a woman's trade to do it for them."

To the girl's ear, there was a stab of reproach in the speech. Perhaps it was her fault: she ought to have taken care of Warren Borden, ought to have kept him from the folly that had killed him. A sense of ignorance and failure woke in her; however helpless a woman might be in every other way, she had no right not to be an expert in this one thing. The reproach gained force when MacIvor and the doctor appeared at the doorway, MacIvor's head circled by new bandages, his face blanched below the burn of the sun, his lips gray.

"Have you no sense at all, Davie MacIvor? You're not fit to be off your back, with that bloodless face to you. Be back to your bed this minute!"

Jane saw the boyish look of guilt relax the man's lean, grim jaws. Miss Ailie had the right of it: till they died, all men needed mothering. Before Miss Ailie's attack even the doctor displayed a certain uneasiness.

"I let him get up, Miss Drummond. I thought best to spare Miss Borden the care of him."

"And so shall she be spared it, Matthew MacLean! Why am I here, else? See him straight to his bed again and be done."

From the moment of her coming she dominated the situation; the negro who had driven her over was despatched to her house with abrupt commands for Sallie; Latham and Johnanna, discovered in the fluttering excitement of their kind, were electrified into instant and energetic performance of their duties about the house; Doctor MacLean departed on his ride to Tyre with Miss Drummond's tart instructions pursuing him down the lane, and Miss Ailie herself, appropriating Jane's little-used sewing equipment, plunged efficiently into the reconstruction of her one black dress, manifestly stimulated by the difficulty of the task.

She talked while she worked and Jane Borden listened in a divided mood. Her conscience per-

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sistently reproached her for the selfish trend of her thought. She ought to be crushed and saddened under grief and shock; instead, she discovered a reluctance to think of Warren Borden at all; she could not bring him back by grieving; her own plight demanded clear thinking and quick action, and, as she studied it, seemed only to reveal more certainly the hopeless tangle in which Warren Borden's death had left her affairs.

There would be no more money from the annuity on which they had lived. She had no property left of her estate except these sterile acres of sand and the house and furniture and horses, unless, perhaps, there was after all some value in the stock of the Dundee Railroad. If she could sell the place there would be, at the most, a few thousands; hardly enough to take her back to the north and maintain her till she could find something to do.

Something to do. With a new sense of inadequacy she contemplated her equipment for self-support. She had been skillfully trained to be expensively useless. She could ride and shoot and dance and play a fairly good hand at bridge; she knew a little French and less music; she ended the miserable inventory with a helpless sense of grievance; they

couldn't have left her more utterly at the mercy of chance if they had deliberately planned to do exactly that. If she could realize on the little that was left and get back to the north with a few dollars of capital, she would be no better off. Friends? Yes, there were plenty of them—the kind of friends with whom one plays bridge on rainy afternoons or golf when the weather invites, but not friends to whom one turns in trouble. She remembered girls who had dropped out of the circle under circumstances more or less like these; others who hung on desperately, angling for invitations, accepting thin courtesies that were affronts for the sake of food and shelter, competing with professionals for the small wage of governess or companion.

"You'll be going north, no doubt," said Miss Drummond, biting a thread grimly. "I'm sad to think of it; we looked for you to stay, Davie Mac-Ivor and I."

"I don't know yet," Jane yielded to an impulse of frankness. "I may not be able to go back. There are difficulties, you see."

She felt the shrewd eyes plumbing hers. "If it is money, dearie, have no worry over it. I'd be blithe to lend."

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The tone brought a sudden sting to Jane's eyes. It was almost appealing, eager, as if this old woman begged for a privilege.

"It's not that—or rather it's partly that. I don't know where I stand. I own this place but it can't be worth much, I suppose, and I can't go back unless I sell it—there isn't anything else that I know of except a lot of stock in that little railroad."

"I have enough of that, myself." Miss Drummond bit another thread savagely. "But you'll have your friends, up yonder."

"None that I dare or care to turn to, I'm afraid." Jane realized suddenly why this was true. Warren Borden had worn friendship fairly thin. She reproached herself for the thought. She ought not to remember anything like that, now; she must be hatefully hard; the right kind of girl would have no room for anything but sorrow, and she seemed to have no room for that.

"You'll stay here till you know which way to turn, at least." She looked up, caught by a hint of satisfaction in the tone. "You'll come to my house, while you stay, of course. You can't live here alone, and I'd be blithe to have a woman with me, after suffering from men bodies all my mortal days."

"Oh, that's lovely of you, but of course I couldn't."

Miss Drummond abolished the refusal with a gesture. "You talk like a man, dearie. The best of them and the worst are always pulling wool over their eyes, but a woman creature sees the straight of it. Confess, now, that there's naught you can do, else, by your own way of it. Like it or no, you're bound to come to Ailie Drummond, and glad she is that it's so, dearie."

Her voice softened on the last phrase, and the gray eyes lighted convincingly.

"You're right, of course, and I'm silly not to admit it." Jane smiled. "Especially when I wanted to say yes at once. You're awfully kind to me."

"We'll not differ as to that, so long as you see sense on the main point. I've yonder great barn of a house, and no living body to share it, unless you count Davie MacIvor—and small good he is to a woman that loves the sound of her voice."

"I'll come, and thank you. But there's a condition—" an illuminating thought presented itself—"I can't be just a guest. If you'll let me help you—" Jane spread her hands. "I've just been realizing that I don't know anything—that if I'd been capable,

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Uncle Warren wouldn't have died. I feel that it's my fault; I let him have anything he wanted; I didn't know any better. But I could learn, if you'd teach me—and I'm ashamed, now, that I need to learn."

"You'll learn, fast enough, never fear. I'll see to that. I didn't think what you were coming at. It's true; there's a trade in being a woman, single or wed, and it's not bred in us, more's the pity. And most of us make sore work of learning it."

She was still expounding this philosophy when Sheppard Gail arrived. He had heard the news through MacLean, and his look and word brought to Jane a comfort which not even Miss Ailie's presence could give her. Gail, for all the superficial differences, belonged to her order, saw things as they seemed to her.

"I can hardly believe it, Miss Borden. He seemed so well last night, so keen on the scheme he'd thought out—"

"It's a pity that he couldn't have tried it," she said slowly. "He would have loved to succeed at something, just once, before he died." A new compassion for the man stirred in her as she remembered how invariably his plans had failed, how confident

he had been of each. He would have found in success far more satisfaction than most men, and, looking back, she could not think of even a trivial essay of his which had led to anything but failure.

"Perhaps it's better this way, after all," she added. "At least he didn't have to watch another idea go wrong."

Gail shook his head. "This one wouldn't have gone wrong, Miss Borden. That's why I'm so awfully sorry he couldn't have lived just a little longer. It's bound to go through."

"Without him? You mustn't count on me." She felt herself flushing under his eyes. One of Warren Borden's little vanities had been to conceal their poverty, to feign the air of a commanding wealth. No doubt in last night's talk he had given Gail this impression. "You see we had nothing except an annuity that stops with his death. I can't promise any financial help at all."

He waved his hand carelessly. "Don't think about that. It doesn't matter, as far as the plan is concerned, and he showed me how to make your railroad stock worth quite a lot. I suppose you—you'll go back north, now?"

She liked the real regret she could feel in the tone.

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It was comforting, to be sure, that here was a friend who would be honestly glad that she meant to stay.

"Frankly, I can't, even if I wanted to. I haven't anything left but this place and the railroad stock, and there's no one in the north that I can go to. I've got to stay here till I can sell the camp or the stock."

Again it pleased her to watch the gleam of satisfaction in his eyes. In a crisis like this, even casual friendship counted.

"Here? In the camp?"

"Miss Drummond's asked me there for the present, and I'm going. I—it's a wonderful comfort to feel that she really wants me."

"You can bank on that," he said heartily. "She don't approve of me, but that's because she don't know how I feel about her." He met Miss Ailie's glance frankly. "I'd like to thank you, Miss Drummond, only I don't see what right I've got to do it."

"You have manners, Sheppard Gail, I'll grant you so much at the worst of you." Jane Borden repressed an impulse to laugh at the relenting grimness of the look and voice. Even Miss Ailie wasn't immune to flattery, properly expressed. Gail could be convincing in these little gallantries. Speeches that

would have sounded absurd and forced on the lips of the men she knew in the north came naturally and gracefully from him. Again she thought of the cavaliers and their flourishes; all this country still lived in a day where such things, as well as the dour hardness of men like MacIvor, were still in order.

He made himself eagerly useful, volunteering to see Mr. Geikie, the minister who on alternate Sundays preached in the church at Bethesda, and who, Miss Drummond declared, was a grand hand at funerals. Jane discovered a new and positive liking for him, strengthened by the very evident approval of Miss Drummond. Till now she had held a kind of pleasant tolerance for his old-fashioned, elaborate courtesies; now there was behind these gestures a personality that had a certain charm of its own, and, besides, a sympathy which she could not doubt.

The sense of utter loneliness which had at first possessed her began to leave her, now, before these proofs of honest friendliness. In New York, she told herself, she would have been really alone; here in this alien country she had found more friends and better friends than she could count among people she had known all her life.

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It interested her, this phenomenon of human nature, and she spared a thought, while Miss Ailie sewed and talked, for an answer to the problem it suggested. Was there something about her which had prevented her from finding truer friendships back there where her life had been spent? She thought not, trying to examine the matter impartially; it was Warren Borden's gift for finding profitless adventures in finance that had alienated the acquaintanceships which should have ripened into something better. People avoided unlucky men by instinct; she remembered, with a touch of shame, how her uncle had used her acquaintances with men and women as a means of furthering schemes of his. It was no wonder that people had held back a little. Down here it was different because they hadn't had time in which to find him out. There was no rancor in the thought. She had, in large measure, the gift of taking people as she found them, and she knew that her uncle had believed in himself and his ideas, but she discovered a reassurance in the thought that no one here would find him out for what he was, that these new friendships would make a sturdy growth instead of withering like those others.

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Men had looked at her before as Sheppard Gail looked at her now, and yet—she checked the thought. It was enough to be sure that she could count on him for companionship as she counted on Miss Drummond for protection. There was MacIvor, too, stiff-necked throwback to Puritan days; but, she realized, a potential millionaire when those square miles of pine woods should be sold. But she thought of Sheppard Gail, in spite of his shabby, decayed gentility, as her chief reliance. MacIvor's future wealth made him important instead of merely amusing, but rich or poor, he interested her only as Miss Drummond's kinsman.

VIII

MR. GEIKIE had seen his God, not once, in any blinding vision, but daily and clear-eyed, through a long tale of years. He was a man incredibly old and shrunken, his face imprinted with that physical canonization which comes to those who earn their sainthood in the hard service of a grim faith and a country church. The very look of him was like a proof of the belief he voiced; the high, thin, trembling speech came to Jane Borden's ear with an unfamiliar healing power; the clergymen she had known in her casual experiments with religion had been successful men, who wore their clericals like uniforms and their gold crosses as if they were medals. This country parson was worlds away from them. She found in herself an instant understanding and an emotional response.

"In the midst of life we are in death," he quavered. "Sorrow is but the means by which we are brought closer to our God."

There were other men in the room, men with Scottish names and Scottish faces masked by the

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red burn of a sub-tropic sun, men whose arms hung loose and awkward from wide, stooping shoulders. They had brought their women, silent creatures in their uncouth dress, to touch Jane's hand and mumble a formula of condolence, before taking the chairs ranged stiffly around the wall of the living room. Each of them, on this excursion, paused to glance at Warren Borden's face, always with the same side-wise headshake which seemed to say that he had changed. To Jane this glance that she had dreaded was comforting; in death Warren Borden had gained a quality he had never shown in life, a dignity and peace were in his face to dim Jane's later memories of him and touch the earlier recollections with a reviving love.

At Miss Drummond's side she followed the slow-spoken words with an intellectual inattention but a deepening emotional accord. She saw Sheppard Gail near the door, and his presence pleased her, his look of serious absorption in the sermon. She was glad when it was ended and she was again in the pine-shadowed air, beside Miss Ailie in the venerable surrey, MacIvor, erect and still in the seat before her, his bandages lending his sun-bitten face a deeper tone of brown. A creaking procession

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of dejected vehicles followed them along the rutted sand, a few horsemen strung out behind these.

The intrinsic horror of the funerals she remembered was lacking here; she felt, rather, that she was in the presence of a natural, inevitable process, and had none of that choking rebellion against death as a needless and cruel thing which had come upon her when she had seen it masked and painted with elaborate pomp and trapping. It was a long drive at a slow walk, to the clearing where the wooden church stood guard over its dead; here, indeed, she felt a sense of desolation; the ugly little building, foursquare and blank, stood on posts which lifted it a few feet above the bare sand. The absence of grass troubled her; the naked earth gave all the graves a look of harsh, bleak newness; the few headstones slanted forlornly in the light soil.

She listened to a somber beat of words like a drum of marching feet, echoing dully as the earth fell into place. A short prayer, vividly personal, as if the minister spoke to a Listener hard by and visible, and it was over. The neighbors spoke to her again, in hushed, clumsy voices, compassionate below an interest and a vague shyness. She found

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herself trying to break this down in her replies, already conscious of some bond between these people and herself, her first acquaintance with the tie of neighborhood, the leveling and linking power of death and grief.

Gail held her fingers for a moment. "I reckon you know I'm sorry, Miss Borden, but you don't know how much. Not yet. Can I ride over pretty soon? I want to talk to you."

"Whenever you please," she said. "You've been a lot of help—more than you guess, I think. Thank you."

"That's one thing I'm sorry about—that I couldn't be more help—a lot more." He spoke simply, for once, and with an added effect of sincerity.

"I'm sure of that, too. Please come."

"I will, soon." He hesitated a moment, and his eye marked that Miss Drummond and MacIvor were a little beyond earshot of a cautious tone. "Excuse my saying it, Miss Borden, but I know how Dave feels about cutting off those pines, and it struck me you might accidentally mention that your uncle was hoping to make him sell. He'd feel bad if he found that out, and I'd honestly hate to have him

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think—I'm mighty grateful to him and Miss Drummond—the way they're standing by you, and I thought—"

"You needn't worry a bit." She couldn't help liking him better than ever, in spite of the implied reflection on her own discretion. She knew how eager he was to see those pines on the market, and what it meant to him and to his family to restore the bankrupt railroad to even a temporary prosperity, and yet he could be considerate of a whim for which he had no respect, could forget his own interest in his desire to prevent her thoughtlessly wounding the feelings of the man who had been kind to her!

"I might have guessed that, I reckon," he said. "I wasn't right sure you understood, or I wouldn't have mentioned it."

She watched him ride away with a new respect, a certain admiration, even, for the quality he had half-bashfully revealed. Till now he had seemed a kind of imitation, a counterfeit of a cavalier in a day which looked on even real cavaliers as artificial and unconvincing; she saw now that he was genuine, that beneath his courtliness there was something better than gestures and a pose.

They drove straight to Miss Drummond's. Jane's belongings and the papers she had found in her uncle's littered desk had been sent over from the camp this morning; there was no need to go back and the girl shrank from the thought of the place, with its new associations and regrets. She listened to Miss Drummond's talk with a growing sense of security, a dawning wonder at the fortune that had thrown her out into a world so willing to make her welcome as this one seemed to be.

The idea reminded her of MacIvor's blunt refusal to credit a blind, pagan goddess with such deeds as this. To him, no doubt, grim and still beside the negro who drove, all these things were so many manifestations of a providential power, intensely and actively concerned in the affairs of men. The thought brought a smile to her lips. She wondered, supposing that MacIvor could be right, what this guiding providence meant to do with her next; there was, she discovered, a distinct appeal in the philosophy. You could escape the harassing need of foreseeing your own future and providing for it, if you sufficiently believed that it was all foreseen and predestined without regard to your desires or deeds.

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The smile broadened as she reflected that David MacIvor himself left as little as might be to the providence he believed in, permitted it to meddle in his affairs only when he could not help it, and then, she added, was exceedingly apt to find it in agreement with his wishes and designs.

The early dusk of the mild winter had begun to settle in the pine aisles when they reached MacIvor's woods. The windows of the house were warmly yellow and there was a distinct effect of welcome and cheer and safety in their look. As she crossed the threshold of the big, bare room, Jane Borden felt as if, after a weary and distressing journey, she had come home.

Miss Ailie's voice broke in on her puzzled contemplation of this feeling.

"David MacIvor, do you mean to tell me you had it in mind to go to the cow barn in your best blacks?"

Jane saw the man stop short at the door, like a boy caught in the act of truancy.

"I forgot," he mumbled. "I had no mind to help with the milking, at all events, Aunt Ailie."

"You surprise me with your penetration, David! A great hole in your head, and you'll not help with

the milk, for once! But you'll change your clothes, or you'll go to no cow barn this night."

He went obediently to his room. His aunt's glance invited Jane to share an amused impatience.

"Take note how he minds, dearie. Yon's the root of managing the whole clan of them. You must keep a firm grip on their clothes, or you've no manner of grip on the man inside."

Supper under the lamp, a plentiful meal of ham and hot bread and honey and new milk; prayers, with MacIvor reading gravely from the book of Job, while the house negroes stood just inside the door, a long, solemn prayer while they knelt at their chairs; Miss Drummond's arm about her shoulders and her kiss on her cheek; there seemed to be no evening whatever, in the sense that Jane had known, and yet she was not conscious of a lack when she carried her lamp to the same room where she had rested after her escape from the grass fire.

Here, unpacking her dressing-case, she found Warren Borden's papers and set herself to order them before she slept. There was a litter of overdue bills for small sums, a carelessly kept check-book showing a small balance, some correspondence with brokers and lawyers, and, in cash, a little over

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a hundred dollars. Till now she had half hoped for something better, and the last paper she examined stirred this hope anew. It was an unfinished letter addressed to Avery Bland, and had evidently been written on the last night Warren Borden lived.

She smiled a little as she read it, at the familiar key of its confident optimism; her uncle admitted that some of his speculations had been unlucky for Bland as well as for himself, but seemed to regard this as almost a proof that it could not happen again. He described the discovery of MacIvor's timber holdings, and their relation to the state of the Dundee and Deep Creek Railroad, and went on eagerly to declare that the situation held a practical certainty of big profits on a small investment.

The writing ended in a blot, as if the pen had dropped on the paper from the hand of a sleepy man. She smiled again, touched and sorrowfully amused by the final demonstration of her uncle's unquenchable faith in his financial star, but the words followed her to the verge of sleep, nevertheless. Perhaps—she tried to reject the insistent idea, but it refused to be laughed away—perhaps this last scheme had been really sound, perhaps, if

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Warren Borden had lived a little longer, he would have died with one taste of success to lessen the bitterness of many failures. Perhaps, in spite of his death, it might be practicable.

Gail would know. She would ask him about it when he came. Again she could find something like comfort in the memory of his look and tone, in the knowledge that he liked her and would stand her friend. She wasn't quite cut off, after all, from her own sort and her own world.

IX

“**D**IDN’T your uncle tell you about his scheme, Jane?”

Gail’s dark face had smoothed to a new thoughtfulness at her question. The timber track was wide enough for them to ride abreast, and his expression puzzled Jane Borden a little.

“No. It was that same night that he died.”

Gail nodded. “That’s so. I’d forgot.” His face seemed to clear, as from a doubt. She fancied that he was relieved, pleased.

“I’m right glad he didn’t, Jane. It’s better you shouldn’t know—not yet, anyhow. The way things are fixed, I mean. You don’t have to worry—the scheme’s all right. I’m tending to it.”

“I’m not worried about that,” she said. “But you don’t understand how I feel. Miss Drummond asked me to stop with her till I could straighten out my affairs. I didn’t know, then, that I hadn’t any affairs to straighten out, and neither did she. As it’s turned out, I’m on her hands indefinitely, and I don’t feel—”

"They're right pleased to have you, Jane. You don't have to fret about that." He spoke quickly. "Anybody'd be glad to—"

"That's very nice, and I hope it's true, but it doesn't alter the facts. I've got to face things; I can't go on this way. They—they're both kind and thoughtful, and perhaps they really do like having me there, but—oh, it's horribly ungrateful of me to think it, I know, but they're not my kind, Sheppard. They're so different from—from us that they don't even know there's a difference. It never occurs to them that their routine may not suit me as perfectly as it suits them, that I may not look at things as they do. They just take it for granted that what satisfies them satisfies me, too."

There was, she thought, a gleam of ironic humor in his look. But he nodded, as she paused, and seemed to wait for her to go on.

"It's hateful to feel this way, but sometimes it seems as if I'd have to scream at the monotony of it. Getting up at daylight—everlasting prayers, after breakfast, with all the house negroes standing in the doorway—work and then more work, till it's dark again. I don't mean that I have any to do—

it would be easier if I did, perhaps—I mean that the idea of work just fills up their lives. They don't work to live, they live to work; you never get out from under the shadow of that word."

"I know." He nodded. "It'd be bound to feel queer to you. But it isn't just because they don't know any better, Jane. If you aim to make a living off this sorry soil you got to work—work all you know, just to keep alive. Dave MacIvor sweats his land mighty hard, but he drives himself a sight harder. He's got to, or sell out and quit."

This pleased and irritated her at once. She had counted on him for sympathy, understanding, and yet she admired his quick defense of the man he disliked.

"I'm not criticizing them. It's just that I don't fit into their scheme of things. I'm in their way; there's no place in that household for an idler, and—I've discovered that being idle is pleasant only when the setting suits it. It's—it's deadly dull here, Sheppard. They've forgotten how to rest and I don't believe they ever knew how to play. And I don't know how to do anything else."

Again he nodded and held his tongue. She moved a hand in an impatient gesture.

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"I could stand it if I could tell myself that it wasn't for long," she went on. "I like them. I know how good they're being to me, and I'm not small enough to resent the obligation. But its suffocates me, looking ahead and seeing nothing but that treadmill round of theirs. Slavery—it's nothing less—slavery to a lot of barren land and a set of antiquated ideas; slavery to an old-fashioned God, to the fear of a physical hell and the hope of a heaven of gold pavements with milk in one gutter and honey in the other. I'm sorry for them, but they don't know they need anybody's pity; I'm sorrier for myself."

"If you can make out to stand it a spell longer you'll get to the end of it. I reckon I can promise you that much. I hate for you to be staying there. But there's no other place, right now. I haven't got any aunt, or I'd ask you—"

She cut in quickly. "You don't understand. I'm not unhappy there—not in the present, I mean. It's oddly bearable, even when I'm bored to tears, and Miss Ailie's no end of fun. It's the future that chokes me. If I could see the end of it—"

"I'm telling you it's coming powerful close, Jane—the end of this. I'm fixing that."

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"Yes, but how? I'm skeptical, no, curious. I can't satisfy myself with nice, indefinite promises. I want to know the details, I want to convince myself that there really is a way out. And that's why you've got to tell me just what it was that Uncle Warren meant."

He shook his head. "Reckon I better not, Jane, not yet awhile, anyhow. You have to take my word for it."

She was offended. "That seems rather strange, doesn't it? Uncle Warren would have told me."

He nodded. "Yes, but things were mighty different then. You weren't living with Dave MacIvor's aunt. I don't know how I can make it look plain to you, the way I see it, without I tell you too much. Maybe I can. It's thisaway."

He hesitated, and she smiled thinly at the final word. Sometimes his speech was as free as hers of the local idiom, though always the resonant, pleasing quality of the country colored and warmed his voice; there were occasions, however, when, as now, he slipped into the local argot, and always she found an unreasonable pleasure in those homely phrases, when he used them, liked him the better for what seemed an evidence of simplicity.

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"This scheme your uncle had—it's all fair and square—he wouldn't 've thought of it if it hadn't been. Only—only it won't look thataway to Dave MacIvor, when he hears about it. You know Dave. He's got a sight of foolish notions, and this scheme—"

"It's something to do with his timber, then, and the railroad?"

"I reckon I better not even answer that."

"You seem to have very little faith in my discretion. She was angry, now. Her voice told him so. He flushed.

"It might look thataway, Jane, but it isn't so. The way you're fixed, living there at Miss Drummond's, Dave's got a right to feel that you wouldn't go against him. No matter if he's wrong in his notions, like we know he is, it wouldn't look decent to him for you to be helping beat him."

Her anger died in a glow of pleased comprehension. Here was the gentleman, the legitimate heir of the cavalier, seeing even sordid business from the point of view of a man of honor! He was protecting her against what his code regarded as a breach of the faith, splitting hairs, perhaps, but splitting them with patient accuracy!

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"I'm sorry, Sheppard. I ought to have seen that for myself. You're right, of course. Don't tell me any more. I'd rather not know."

He brightened. "You understand that it's all fair, this notion your uncle had? There's no reason why you shouldn't know about it, help me work it out, excepting only that while you're living over yonder—"

"I understand. And I'm glad you saw it as you did. It would be contemptible of me, if I knew."

"You got to remember that Dave's going to profit by it, a sight more 'n anybody else. We're aiming to do him the biggest favor anybody could. It's only his wrong-headed notions that don't look at it right."

"Yes. I quite understand." She felt a warmth of liking for him. "It's just what I might have expected of you; I'm ashamed that I didn't guess."

He drew rein abruptly and both horses paused. He in the saddle, facing her.

"I—I got no right to talk, the way I'm fixed, Jane. You know how that is—you been to my place—you've seen what it's like. But I can't stand it—having you look ahead and never seeing no end to it. I got to tell you, Jane. I been wanting

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to tell you since the first evening you got here, that time I saw you at the station. I reckon, maybe, you guessed. I couldn't help showing it, some. But this scheme is going to fix it all up—you're going to make plenty out of it. You'll be fixed comfortable enough to do what you're a-mind to, I mean. And I'm going to be fixed so't I can ask you to love me back, Jane."

His voice made her think of a violin and something in her sang and quivered in response to it. She had a stab of self-reproach for her earlier thought of him; she'd laughed at his gallantry as a kind of harmless affectation, thought of him as a figure in some amiable comedy, with his shabby gentility, his elaborate manners, his threadbare pride. And while she had laughed he had loved her, had held his tongue, had worked and planned in her interest, and, where she would have seen no question of ethics, had safeguarded her honor in his own sight more jealously than his own.

"I'd have asked you right out, that time your uncle died," he went on, in the same singing key. "I wanted to, Jane! I like to died, leaving you go live yonder at Miss Drummond's, when I wanted you like I never wanted to live! But I couldn't

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ask you—I knew I had to wait till I'd fixed it so you'd be rich again."

Her eyes widened. He couldn't ask her to marry him till he'd made her rich!

He seemed to see the question in her look. "I had a house, such as it is, and I could make out to take care of you, but I couldn't go asking you then, could I? When you were fixed so it looked like there wasn't any other way out? I couldn't come offering you my old house and me, when it might look like I was giving you something, instead of getting everything? I was plumb bound to wait till you could say yes or no, without thinking of anything else only did you want to or not. You can say it now, Jane. In a little while you'll have plenty to go back north, if you're a-mind to. You don't have to stay down here and choose between my place and Miss Drummond's—you can—"

Her hands went out to him impulsively. "I'll stay," she heard herself whisper. "I'll stay where you stay, Sheppard."

Afterward, when she tried to search out the truth, it seemed as much her own idea as Gail's, though the suggestion came from him in a persuasive rush

of eager, pleading words. She was shamed by the knowledge that, as she listened, the life at Miss Drummond's house was in her mind, the contrast between its dour, bleak servitude to work and God and the shiftless, inviting indolence of Gail's existence as she had imagined it from chance glimpses when the hounds met in front of his shabby, beautiful old house among the pines; the slipshod comfort of the mellow rooms where he lived in his litter of pipes and tattered copies of *The Field*, where bits and crops and riding-gloves were scattered about in comforting confusion and his pet copy of *Handley Cross* seemed as characteristic and significant as MacIvor's worn old Bible. There was even an added reason in the thought that to-morrow was Miss Drummond's cleaning day, when the rooms would be relentlessly turned inside out in pursuit of non-existent dust. There was temptation in the thought of escaping to-night's prayers, the plodding tempo of MacIvor's voice reading from the Old Testament, the slow fervor of his praying tone, the inevitable retreat to the bare room under the roof, to lie awake, listening to stealthy noises in the woods and looking forward joylessly to another day.

"There's no reason why we got to wait, Jane, if

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you care. I don't feel like I could leave you go back to Dave's, now I know. I've got so that when night comes I saddle up a horse and ride over yonder to Miss Drummond's, so I can see the light go out in your window. We could ride down to the village right now—"

The thought came to Jane Borden, touched with a childlike glamour of adventure and romance, beckoning like some innocent forbidden escapade. She felt, too, a sudden, overpowering hunger for the release it promised, as an open cell-door might tempt a prisoner to a crazy break for freedom.

The intoxication of a reckless gallop through the shadow-dappled lanes, the pounding beat of hoofs in deep, loose sand, the consciousness of a share in the power and life and eagerness of the plunging beast that carried her, as if, like the mare, she had been set free from some restraining overmastery, all these contributed to the acquiescent, unthinking mood that lay upon her through the ride, that carried her almost defiantly into the shabby little study where Mr. Geikie listened soberly to Gail's swift explanation of their errand. They supported her as she stood up beside Sheppard Gail, only half-aware of the wide-eyed stares of the minister's

wife and sister, summoned from the kitchen to be witnesses; they gave her voice assurance, when it was her turn to answer.

Only when the final words came to her with an exaggerated effect of solemnity did she wake to a clear knowledge of what she had done, and even then she had no real regret. Gail's hand closed tight on hers; she felt the quick strength of the lean fingers; there was in her a joyous consciousness of giving, a sense of infinite superiority to the Jane Borden who all her life had given little, taken much.

They rode away at a walk, sparing the horses, and Jane's mood seemed to reflect the change in pace. Her thought could stop its headlong gallop and plod soberly at last.

"We'd better take this turn, hadn't we?" She drew rein as Gail would have taken the fork that branched off toward his house—her house, now. "I can't go without telling them."

He seemed to hesitate between opposing desires.

"Besides, I'll have to pack my things."

"That's so." He nodded. "I'll ride with you to the slanting pine, anyhow. I—" he stopped again—"I was thinking that maybe it might be better if you told them without me being there. They—they're

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right set against me, Jane. It's going to be mean news to them."

"But no worse for your being with me, surely?"

"I don't know. I keep thinking how I'd feel if I was Dave MacIvor. I'd hate it a sight worse if I had to look at Shep Gail when Jane Borden told me she'd married him. It's bound to be bad enough for old Dave without that."

Again the glow of her liking warmed to him. Even now he could put himself in MacIvor's place, take thought of sparing the man who hated him.

"You think everybody's in love with me because you are," she said lightly. "It won't mean anything to David MacIvor except that he's well rid of a troublesome guest who doesn't understand his ways or agree with his whimsies. But it's like you to think of it that way. You're quite right, except that he doesn't care a straw what happens to me, as long as I'm out of his way. I'll go alone. You can ride—" her tongue tripped at the word, but she forced it—"you can ride home and send a cart for my trunks. It may be just a little easier to face Miss Ailie if I'm alone. She's so outspoken, and she doesn't approve of you, of course. It would be a pity if she forced a quarrel on us."

"She won't ever do that—not on me," said Gail. "No matter what she says, I'm bound to remember she's been good to you when there was nobody else to do it. But it's better if I don't go. And I can start that nigra of mine in to cleaning up some. It's a mighty sorry place to bring a lady. I wasn't figuring on carrying home a wife when I come away this morning."

She saw, below his smile, that he was honestly relieved at her willingness to fall in with his preference, and again her thought softened toward him. She had done a crazy thing, she admitted now; it was hard to believe that she'd married this man, this stranger, on the impulse of a momentary discontent, but she felt that she had made no mistake. He rang true; she told herself that his sensibilities and perceptions were finer than her own, and she watched him, as he cantered away, with a glow of pride and possession, conscious of the perfection of his riding as another proof that she had chosen well.

She would not quarrel with the life that lay before her; she would live out her days in a great peace of solitude and love, as careless of trifling discomforts as Sheppard Gail himself. Poverty,

here, was a superficial matter, a detail, no tragedy. Gail, no less than MacIvor, had taught her this.

She smiled at the thought. Under that surface sophistication Gail was just a shy, backwoods boy, after all. A protective, maternal impulse stirred in her; she would take care of him. She was happy; she was always going to be happy. She touched the mare with her heel, as if to leave the last of her doubts behind.

A shabby man on a forlorn mule passed her at the edge of MacIvor's Folly woods. She knew him as an incorrigible, saturated idler who hung about the courthouse at Tyre, open to occasional odd-jobs of process-serving, a willing juror, industrious only in shunning labor and finding drink. His presence here puzzled her; Andie Craig was an improbable visitor at Miss Drummond's gate. He touched his rusty black hat as he jogged past, and she caught a look of something like disfavor in his watery eye. It followed her with an effect of reproach while she stabled the mare; it was still in her mind when she faced Miss Drummond and MacIvor in the gallery. She was angry at herself for imagining that the same shadow of reproach and doubt was in MacIvor's glance.

A feeling of regret troubled her. She should have thought of these two, have waited until they could be told. It would look to them as if she had been afraid or ashamed, or as if she had carelessly ignored their claim of friendliness and service. She almost welcomed the gravity of their faces, the sense of impending trouble she should feel in their silence, as an excuse for deferring what had suddenly become a confession.

"Is anything wrong, David?"

"If Andie Craig has not found a mare's nest in the heel of his jug, something is wrong enough." He shut his lips grimly. "And for once the man had no sound of liquor." His tone changed. "You rode alone to-day?"

She could feel a mounting heat in her cheeks.

"No. Sheppard Gail rode with me. He turned back at the clearing."

Why couldn't she tell them bluntly and be done? She hated herself for the forced lightness of her tone, as if Sheppard Gail meant nothing to her this morning that he had not meant yesterday. She saw MacIvor's lips tighten again and felt a sudden bitterness of antipathy in his silence.

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"I wish you two were friends, David. I'm sure, if you knew how he feels toward you—"

"I'm finding out, Jane." He seemed to halt his speech with a visible effort. Miss Ailie carried on for him.

"Small wonder that he takes it ill, Jane. The blood in him mislikes a beating more than most. And he sets such store by his timber—"

"The timber?" Jane started. "Has anything happened about that?"

"He did not tell you, then? I made sure of so much." Miss Drummond flashed an eloquent look at MacIvor. "I made sure you would have told us, if you knew—though, for the matter of that, a pine tree more or less is no killing business, say what you will, Davie MacIvor. Your Mr. Geikie would tell you that you are but well served for heeding overmuch the things of this world. Did I not tell you Jane had no guess of this?"

"I needed small telling." He spoke with an emphasis that startled the girl.

"But I do," she said quickly. "What is it all about? I don't understand."

"He has struck me a shrewd blow, Jane. I have been blind that I did not see my weakness long

since. The County Commissioners voted yesterday to build a new courthouse and cut forty miles of new road, the cost of all this to be paid with bonds, bonds that must be carried and amortized out of taxes, and these taxes fall for the most part on me and my pines. There is little else in the county against which a new levy could be laid. It is a shrewd shift. I have made sore work of even the old tax and these new ones will be four times worse, or maybe more!"

The force of the simple scheme was instantly clear to Jane. Her memory flashed back to the day when Gail and Warren Borden had talked while MacIvor lay unconscious at the camp. "The county most generally goes like we say—" she could hear Gail's pleasant, chuckling drawl. This device had been in his thought to-day. He had refused to tell her because she was MacIvor's guest and it was not fitting that she should be privy to an attack upon him. But he might have told her afterward. She defended him instantly against the reproach. There had been better things to talk of then.

"He didn't tell me. Of course I've known that he hoped you'd sell your timber. I've hoped that, myself—selfishly, at first, of course, but on your

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account, too, since I've been here and seen how terribly you work to hold it. It seems a pity, when you could be rich by selling only the half of it. I can't help feeling that it's the best thing that could happen to you, to be rid of it. And the country, too—it's so desperately poor and hopeless, and this money will build roads and schools."

"You see but the one side, Jane."

Miss Ailie cut in sharply. "Oh, have done with it, Davie, man. You've carried your woods on your stiff neck overlong at the best of it. My tongue's weary with the telling of you. A tree is a tree, and there's small wit in setting the best of them over a human body. You can sell now, with a clean conscience to you, before the Gails herd you to it like a stubborn ox."

He stiffened as if under a blow. "No Gail that lives will herd me to that selling, or aught else. I take no man's bidding."

Jane caught the tone in which he spoke before the words registered on her brain. It troubled her, that tone, the voice in which he spoke the name of Gail. Miss Ailie's tongue clicked impatiently.

"Davie, Davie, do you not see that to the selling you'll come, under the whip, at the end of it, taking

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a fool's price where now you can take your own? They can vote on the taxes till the last acre's gone, and you no penny the richer, besides the shame of being driven by the Gail breed and their kind."

Again Jane felt a sting in the voice.

"And am I the less disgraced and driven if I sell my timber now?" MacIvor spoke with slow heat. "The time has gone for that, if there is no more here than a need to save my face and yours. Here is the glove thrown down. Would you have me let it rest—you, who taught me where the MacIvor got his name? Are you for surrender to these Gails, at the first word of the fighting?"

Jane stood very still, frightened at the passion in the man's face and voice. His speech was the speech of men who had loved the ring of claymores above the clack of tongues. But below that revelation she saw, amazed and shocked and terrified, a flaming hatred of the Gails, a hatred that was four parts contempt. Here, she knew at least, was no mere quarrel between man and man, but a wakened pride of race and blood that would die hard and slowly before it yielded to a breed that it despised.

And she must tell them, after this, that for an hour and more, she had been Sheppard Gail's wife!

X

“**I** MARRIED Sheppard Gail this morning.”

She flung the blunt speech across their anger. It seemed as if she dared not wait to soften the shock of it by any preface of explanation, lest they go on to say that which even she might not forgive. But she saw, in the thick silence that seemed to magnify her tone by contrast, like the stillness that follows a blast, that to each of them the bluntness was a blow full in the face, a blow gratuitous and unforeseen.

MacIvor's eyes held hers. She wondered at the change in them, at the effect of distance that they put between Jane Gail and this man who had known Jane Borden. She saw that the surprise had not stunned him, that, in a flash, he had readjusted himself to the changed situation, that he looked, now, at a stranger, an enemy, the friend who had repaid a debt in what must seem betrayal. His features hardened in a mask of flint.

“Whatever for?”

It was Miss Drummond who found her tongue,

but her voice held for Jane that same effect of distance that she found in David MacIvor's steady gaze. She turned to the woman with a conscious effort, appalled by the discovery that there was no answer to the question. She had married Shepard Gail, and she could not say why, even to herself; she tried to remember that discussion in the woods, the man's eager, hurrying speech, her own retreating, weakening rebuttals, the blurred emotions of the gallop through the pines, the breathless instant while Mr. Geikie waited for her answer and there had still been time to draw back. There was no reason in it; she looked back at a Jane Borden wholly strange to herself, a woman who drifted, scarcely resisting, in a fierce, swift flood of impulse.

MacIvor spared her the need to reply. He turned stiffly to his aunt, and his voice was harder and colder than Jane had ever heard it.

"Surely, Aunt Ailie, we may take Mrs. Gail's reasons for granted. She is not required to account to us for what she does."

The tone bit and stung. Mrs. Gail! He could say those two words so that they were an affront. Jane Gail felt again a contempt that had nothing to

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do with this man's quarrel against Sheppard Gail, a contempt like that between the white man and the black. It served to wake her own pride. She lifted her head.

"Of course I owe you both any explanations you want," she said quickly. "But there isn't anything to explain, is there? There's nothing strange in my liking Sheppard."

"I have just said that same thing, Mrs. Gail, have I not?"

Again the name on his lips seemed a deliberate offense. Her anger glowed under the look and tone.

"Thank you, David." She fancied that the riposte went past his guard although he gave no sign. Miss Ailie intervened alertly, and Jane knew that she had tried the old lady's love and loyalty too far.

"I am thinking that here is a great deal of talk," said Miss Drummond. "Davie MacIvor and I will both be wishing you all happiness, Jane, with this man you have chosen."

Jane felt in her voice the same whiplash quality she had resented in David MacIvor's. It angered her, stiffened her reserve against the impulse to

throw herself frankly on Miss Ailie's sympathies. These people, for some unknowable reason, held themselves above Sheppard Gail, and, because she had identified herself with him, above her as well. So be it, she told herself. There was no arguing against a prejudice, and, much as she owed them, she could not owe them the humiliation of her husband by a defense of him or of her marriage.

"And I thank you, for this and for everything," she said quietly. "I came back to pack up my things. Sheppard will send for them this afternoon."

MacIvor stood aside for her to pass to the stair. Miss Drummond hesitated briefly and then led the way. Jane half dreaded the interview that lay before her, without MacIvor's presence to restrain the old lady's formidable tongue, but Miss Drummond's new formality did not relax when they were alone in Jane's room, and the girl was divided between relief and regret. She saw, clearly enough, that Ailie Drummond had done with her; she told herself that she deserved it, but she missed sorely the shrewd sympathy on which, intuitively, she had counted. More than once, as she collected her belongings under the unrelenting eyes, she was on the

point of forgetting her offended dignity in a forthright appeal, but always the grimness of the lips and the cold brightness of the gaze restrained her. She had lost Miss Ailie, she told herself; there was nothing to be done about it.

The conviction frightened her a little, woke in her a new sense of loneliness such as she had not felt since Warren Borden's death, nor even then, with Miss Ailie's strong affection surrounding her. Vaguely, in the back of her mind, a doubt arose, less a doubt of Sheppard Gail than of herself, of the quality of the emotion that had governed her to-day.

MacIvor had disappeared when they returned to the lower floor, and Jane hesitated again between her need for understanding and forgiveness and her smarting pride. It was all wrong, this manner of parting; she discovered, suddenly, that the room had its own hold upon her, that in leaving it she was breaking a bond of which, till now, she had not been aware.

"I—I wish you were glad about it, Miss Ailie." She ventured the speech on impulse, her hands ready to reach out at any sign of a response from the grim old woman who watched her.

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"That is to wish overmuch," said Miss Drummond dryly. "But I will match it for hopefulness by wishing that you will not be over sorry."

Jane Gail had a swift foreboding at the level voice, the unyielding grimness of the lips and eyes. There was a certitude here that frightened her; Miss Ailie spoke as if of sure knowledge.

"I'm going to be glad," she said. "And somehow, too, I'm going to make you forgive me for the way I've treated you. I didn't mean to be—I didn't think about it. You're the only friends I've got, you and David, and I just can't lose you both."

Miss Drummond rubbed her chin deliberately. "It's like to be a costly morn, in friendships," she said after a pause. "You'll make a sore task of it, I'm thinking, being a friend to Davie MacIvor and a wife to Sheppard Gail."

The tone seemed to end the interview. Jane forced herself to say her good-by evenly and carried her little bag out to her tethered horse without a backward look. She rode fast, afraid only, now, of meeting David MacIvor before she got away. But at the first turn beyond the rim of the woods she

saw him, waiting in the path, and drew rein as he lifted his arm in signal.

"I have this to say to you, Mrs. Gail : my aunt has a heavy tongue, and this is a sore shock to her. If she has spoken in anger, I would have you remember that her regard is neither lightly given nor lightly lost. If it should happen that you stand again in need of help at her hand, have no fear to seek it."

"Thank you, David." She insisted on the name as if to reject the implication of his careful formality. "I should have counted on her, and on you, too, even if you hadn't told me."

He stood aside without answer and she saw that he regarded the conversation as finished. She cantered on, knowing, although she did not turn, that he stood watching her until the curving lane carried her from sight.

The familiar scene found, as she saw it now, a new and melancholy appeal ; it reminded her of the day when she had said good-by to the old house in the square and the touch of the hand-smoothed banister rail had made her cry. She resisted the sentimentality of the mood, a little angry at herself ; there was no reason for any association with these waste places ; she had lived among them for a matter

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of weeks; it was silly to feel this pang of regret at leaving them.

The memory of Miss Drummond's face and voice rode with her; it was absurd to be so sorry over that forfeited friendliness. Miss Ailie, after all, was an alien, a stranger, like MacIvor. Their ways were not her ways; she had found shelter with them for a space and now went back to her own kind. There was nothing to regret. And yet, as she passed the forefront of MacIvor's Folly woods and glanced back at the rank of pines, she felt the sting of unshed tears, a slow pain in her throat.

She put the folly resolutely from her. The mare quickened pace at the touch of her heel. She forced her thoughts forward to the old house under the creeper-masked sycamores in the hollow, where Sheppard would be waiting . . . Sheppard Gail . . . her man, now in sickness and health, for better, for worse. A sense of panic stirred in her, the words of the service echoed in her brain, touched with a somber gravity. Even in the mellow sun she felt a sudden chill; her hand tightened on the rein and the mare slowed willingly to a walk.

Presently even this pace seemed to carry her for-

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ward too fast. She dismounted at the crest of a rise, tethered the mare and found a seat on a fallen pine. Elbows on knees she looked out over the desolate scrub to the blue distance where Gail would be waiting for her, waiting for his wife. . . .

She struggled against a dull, insistent fear of the future waiting yonder among those scattered pines, a sense of foreboding that had no basis in reason or fact and yet would not be stilled by logical self-reassurance. Even, now that she faced it close, this future made her afraid of Sheppard Gail himself; her former attitude toward him, protective, compassionate, gave way to a doubt as it came home to her that she had put her life into his hands, herself at his mercy, knowing little—less than little—of the man below the manners.

The shadows slanted out before her and the warmth faded from the thin sun. The mare fretted at her tether, pawed the loose sand. Jane Gail forced herself to the saddle against the doubts that held her back. This was all sentimental nonsense, the sort of maidenly qualms beloved of the verbose novelist of a dead century. She urged the horse to a canter; unless she made haste it would be dark before she reached the house and she was suddenly

afraid of the night, eager for the sanctuary of walls and lights.

At the best speed she could make, it was twilight when she came to the top of the ridge and saw the old house in the hollow below, where the shadows seemed to have settled like lees in some clear fluid. There was no light to beckon her; she shivered at the sight of the bare, gray arms of the sycamores lifting from the mantle of evergreen creeper, at the twisted pine branches silhouetted black against the gray, low sky. Beneath them the old house seemed to lie in wait, stealthy, furtive. Her throat tightened. She was afraid.

At the open gate a figure leaped up before her and the mare shied away from a hand that reached up for the bit. Jane felt a terrified repulsion as she stared at the flat, yellow face of the negro who grinned up at her, pawing in eager pantomime, a wordless, straining gurgle in his throat.

She knew that he was harmless; Gail had talked often of his mute house boy, had mimicked to the life these grotesque attempts at speech. It had seemed funny, his imitation of the fumbling gestures, the hideous, bubbling chuckle. She even un-

derstood that the negro was welcoming her, and did her best to reason down the terror that held her by the throat. The black manifestly sought to convey some meaning by the signs and sounds; he pointed at the house and shook his head emphatically, nodding backward at a path that led to one side of the building, as if to beckon her in that direction, and without a pause the gurgling monotone of his voice was in her ears, a sound like a death rattle, like a man strangling.

Against her will she screamed, and the keen, sudden sound cut deep into her tight nerves, terrifying her afresh. The mare reared, the negro clinging to the bit with both hands. She screamed again and there was a hoarse, answering hail from the house. She heard a door crash, the sound of heavy feet, and saw Sheppard running toward her. A great relief came to her; she called him by name, eagerly, as he came near.

He did not answer. She saw him strike out twice, quick lashing blows, she heard the impact of fists on flesh, saw the negro stagger back, stumble and fall. Unbelieving, she saw Gail spring after him, kick savagely, again and again, at the squirming figure on the ground, the hideous un-

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varying bubble of the mute's voice a background for words that were like carrion and filth.

"Sheppard! Don't!" She found her voice through a suffocation of horror. "You'll kill him."

His foot lashed out again; the mute twisted clear and scrambled away through the bushes. Gail turned. She caught her breath as he came back to her.

"Learn him to frighten a lady," he said thickly. "Know better next time, I reckon." He led the horse up the path to the house, walking unsteadily and grumbling under his breath. Jane was dazed into something like acquiescence. She could not clear her thought until he stopped before the door and lifted a wavering hand toward her. Then, disregarding it, she slipped from the saddle and faced him.

It was too dark to see clearly, but she caught a familiar smell, and thought inconsequently of Warren Borden, of death.

"Where you been all day? Been waiting for you hours 'n' hours 'n' hours." He seemed to pause to reconsider this speech and to find it good. "Hours 'n' hours 'n' hours," he said again. "Where you been?"

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She fought to control a hot disgust. Drunkenness, cheap and hateful as it was, could explain if not excuse the worst of this. She forced herself to even speech.

"I couldn't come any sooner, Sheppard. Let's go in. It's cold out here."

He laughed unsteadily as he walked in at her side. The room that greeted her was frowsy, littered, the air thick with the fumes of corn whisky and tobacco. She marveled at herself for being able to come into it with no sign of disappointment or displeasure. This was her house, now, her man, her life.

Facing an instant need of competency and decision she had no thought to waste on self-compassion. She found matches on the mantel and lighted a lamp, amazed at the steadiness of her hand. The yellow light revealed the disorder of the room, the swollen, discolored face of the man who eyed her, swaying a little as he leaned against the table.

"Where you been, all this time?" he demanded, his voice grating. "What you mean, keepin' me waitin' hours 'n' hours 'n' hours, eh? Tell me 'at!"

She drew back from the menace of his tone and

look, compelling her mind to center on the immediate emergency rather than the graver issue with which, in the light of this self-revelation, she must presently concern herself. There was no time to waste on regret for the folly of her marriage. For her present safety she must somehow pacify and dominate. Later—

Her deliberate retreat before his wavering advance seemed to anger him.

"Stand still," he said, his voice ugly. "What you mean—runnin' away thataway?"

"I'm not running, Sheppard." She managed to speak evenly, to force a smile. "Do sit down and let me. I'm so tired."

He swayed on his heels, regarding her sullenly. Suddenly he lurched, his arms outstretched, so swiftly that she barely avoided their clutch. Panic overcame her; she sprang to one side, reached a door and slipped past it, closing it barely in time to receive his plunging rush. It opened outward, and for a moment or two he wasted his strength on futile plunges against it. She had time to slip the heavy bolt before he began wrenching at the knob. The outline of a window prompted a blind impulse to escape. Gail, hammering at the panels,

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terrified her more than when she had faced him with no intervening barrier. She thrust with all her strength at the sash; it held at first, but yielded as a panel splintered. She scrambled over the low sill and fell heavily among spiked shrubs, stumbled to her feet and ran blindly toward the looming shadow of trees.

She cannoned into solid boles, fell and rose and ran again, the outcry guiding her. Presently it stopped. Glancing back she saw Gail in the doorway, the smoking lamp held high and unsteadily above his head.

"I see you! I got you now!" His voice thinned to a high, wavering scream and again she fled from it, climbing a slope between young pines where a carpet of dry needles muffled the sound of her plight. Gail's voice, below and farther and farther to the side, lent her strength and swiftness till she stumbled out upon the main road at the crest of the ridge, where its distant faintness told her that she could pause for breath. Listening, a crazy impulse urged her toward hysterical laughter; a little while ago she had thought of Sheppard Gail as a modern cavalier, a knightly survival from an age of chivalry!

A sudden memory of the grimness of MacIvor's face as he heard the news of her marriage steadied and cleared her mind, awoke her to understanding of the edged contempt she had felt in his voice and Miss Ailie's in their earlier speech of Sheppard Gail. They knew—they must have known—what manner of man she had married. The word came to her like a blow. She belonged to that—that drugged and poisoned animal who stumbled through the brush in the hollow; she had run away from his grotesque, clutching fingers but she couldn't escape from his graver hold upon her, from his—his right over her—

She shook herself free of the thought. That was MacIvor's idea of marriage, that absurd notion that a hasty word could bind her for a lifetime to a man like Sheppard Gail. The world had moved a long way past such outworn folly; she belonged to herself; she was as free as ever to live as and where she chose.

But the word brought her to an abrupt halt in the rutted sand. She had chosen to turn back toward the gray-silver house in MacIvor's Folly woods, as confident of welcome as if she had never left it. Now, as she realized that to Miss Ailie as cer-

tainly as to David MacIvor himself, she had merged her life and self with Sheppard Gail's, she was suddenly afraid of finding that friendly door open to her only in fact, not feeling.

MacIvor, to be sure, had been at pains to tell her that she could count as always on Miss Ailie's friendship, but the memory of the tone in which they both had named the Gails lifted a doubt in Jane's mind, a doubt that drove her to an unwilling, frightened thought of the only other refuge open to her, the closed, darkened hunting lodge in the lonely woods. For a little she considered it soberly; she knew that if she must she could face its solitude, even the memories and associations that would always make her think of death. It was another fear that decided her at last. Sheppard Gail might guess that she would turn from his door to her own, might come and find her there, alone and helpless. . . . She shivered as if the wind had risen and stumbled forward through the rutted sand of the long road toward MacIvor's Folly.

Slowly, as she plodded over the seven endless miles, her doubt receded; she saw the high, black mass of the tall pines, at last, with a sure sense of

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homecoming and when, at the end of the curving lane through the timber, the warm yellow squares of the windows greeted her, she found an unsuspected store of strength that carried her, running, toward their placid welcome.

XI

FOR a long, silent space Jane stood in the doorway, MacIvor half barring her from the warmth and safety of the wide room, Miss Drummond erect and motionless beside the lamp, her needle suspended above her mending, her face blank with question.

Under that grim, almost forbidding gaze, Jane Gail groped in vain for words. And quite suddenly she was spared the need of speech; she discovered that she could cry, found herself clinging tight to Miss Drummond, felt strong, protecting arms about her.

"Be off with you, Davie MacIvor. You're not needed here."

The voice snapped like a whip over Jane's shoulder. She heard the door creak and close, MacIvor's heavy step on the gallery floor, and, easily now, her own voice telling the story, prompted here and there by a shrewd and pertinent question. Then she was in her old room, with Miss Drummond putting her efficiently to bed while she listened, and presently

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Sallie fetched a tray of food, which, amazingly, Jane could swallow.

"We'll talk of this in the morning," said Miss Drummond. "You'll be needing sleep more than speech, to-night."

"I had to come back; I couldn't go anywhere else."

"You showed sense there, at all events," said the old lady. "And now you'll be showing more of that same, by going to sleep. We'll talk of this in good time."

The door closed, and, with the darkness, a profound fatigue descended on Jane Gail, a weariness that was benign and grateful, like the deep security that lay over her, the comfort of lavender-smelling linen and warmth. She heard, remotely, a blur of lowered voices in the room below, distinguished MacIvor's heavier tone and Miss Drummond's brisk, snapping speech in interjected answers. She drifted into unconsciousness with the sound in her ears, and wakened under a slant of sun that startled her with a sense of guilt.

By day her problem seemed more complex, if less terrifying. She faced it helplessly while she dressed and found it waiting for her, when she came downstairs, in the person of her husband.

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The big living room was empty and she opened the veranda door to cross the gallery to the kitchen, where, she guessed, Miss Drummond would be at her morning housekeeping. Sheppard Gail stood face to face with her as she stepped out.

For a moment her mind stood still. He was seemingly himself, showing no signs of his yesterday's excesses, except that his eyes were bloodshot and his hand shook a little as he fumbled with his hat brim.

"I fetched over your mare, Jane. And Cash is driving the wagon for your trunks. You ready?"

She met his eyes squarely. "I'm not going," she said evenly. "That's over and done with."

He grinned. "Too quick to suit me, Jane. Reckon we both got a few years left to live. Go get your things and we'll start."

"I'm not coming," she said again. "I saw and heard enough last night to decide that point quite finally."

"You mean you're going to quit me, just because I got to drinking some? Don't you reckon a man's got a right to celebrate a wedding, Jane? I'm right sorry if I scared you—"

"I'm not coming. You'd better go. I don't want

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to see you again. I want to forget—if I ever can!”

His eyes narrowed suddenly. “Quit fooling, Jane. That kind of talk might be all right if we weren’t married. Reckon you aim to forget that, too. But it ain’t so easy—forgetting you’re married. Go get your things and let’s start.”

She shook her head and would have moved past him toward the kitchen wing, but his hand fell on her arm and she felt his fingers tighten.

“Don’t try that on me, Jane. You come on home, where you belong.”

His voice grated. She made no effort to resist his grip of her wrist; no longer, strangely, was she in the least afraid of him. Before she could speak Miss Ailie appeared at the kitchen door and Gail half-turned to face her, still holding Jane’s wrist.

“I come over to fetch home my wife, Miss Drummond,” he said flatly. “Reckon you-all ain’t heard—”

“I’ve heard much, Sheppard Gail.” Miss Drummond wiped damp hands on her apron. “Over-much.”

He scowled. “It don’t matter what she’s told you. I come for her.”

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"I hear you say so, Sheppard. You've had a brave ride for your pains, I'm thinking."

"I thought so." His lips drew away from his teeth. "You're putting her up to it, are you? Trying to keep her here—"

"You've some penetration, then. I'd be blithe to keep her, if she needed the asking. So far she's done well without it. And I'll be asking you to ride on, Sheppard Gail. It's cleaning day with me, and I've small time for gossip."

He jerked sharply at Jane's arm. "We'll go without your hat, if you don't want it. You come along, now, and quit this fooling."

Jane was still unafraid of him, almost minded to laugh at the bluster of his tone, until she saw David MacIvor behind him, and a stab of fright shot across her mood, as though MacIvor's coming had somehow precipitated a danger of which till now she had been unaware. Gail dropped her arm, turned.

"Reckon I can talk up to you, anyhow," he said slowly. "I take it right unfriendly of you, Dave—keeping my wife away from me like you're doing."

His voice was almost gentle and yet Jane was

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sensible of its menace. MacIvor came up the steps deliberately, his face set.

"You choose a strange word, between us, Gail. I have not claimed friendship with you, that I remember, nor have I reason to think you feel it for me. But as to this lady, I will have no room for doubt. She is here, in my aunt's house, by her own will and act, and with my aunt's consent. It has no more than this to do with me—or you."

Gail laughed, a thin, harsh note of triumph. "I figured you wasn't hunting for trouble, Dave—not that kind, anyhow. Step one side while I take my wife along home."

He reached for Jane's arm, but MacIvor's hand dropped on his wrist.

"If Mrs. Gail goes with you it will be by her own wish and will, Gail. I will not lift finger to keep her, nor yet will I see her carried by the strong hand. It is for her to say if she stays or goes."

"I'm staying," said Jane quietly. "That was settled finally, last night."

For a moment she fancied that Gail would strike. His eyes narrowed and glittered, and his hand moved ever so slightly toward his side. MacIvor, facing

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him, did not stir. There was a tense instant of silence, and then Gail laughed.

"Reckon I lose, then. Its a lady's privilege to change her mind in a hurry. Maybe she'll change it again. I can wait. And I'm kind of apt to remember things, Dave—little things like this."

He swung away almost gayly to his horse. Jane watched him spring to the saddle with an unwilling admiration, in spite of her shamed disillusion. He was more like the man she had married—the thought came home to her like a blow, and David MacIvor, turning gravely to her, lent it force.

"Good morning, Mrs. Gail," he said gravely, and walked past her into the house. For an instant, as she watched Sheppard Gail's horse cantering toward the woods, Jane was almost sorry that she had not ridden with him.

XII

“**A**ND he shall be like a tree, planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season. His leaf also shall not wither and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.”

The sober, marching rhythm in which MacIvor read the scripture passages at evening prayers changed on the final phrase. Jane Gail felt a ring in his voice, as of personal defiance, as if he took literally and to himself the prophecy and promise of the psalm. Indeed, for once, the personal application of the words, always a vivid reality to MacIvor, she knew, seemed almost as reasonable and real to her, as if King David had been thinking about MacIvor when first he sang that song.

“The ungodly are not so, but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away.”

She felt the deep bite of the contemptuous figure. The Psalmist had groped for a simile that would lend extraordinary power to his declaration that righteousness was profitable wisdom, and sin a costly kind of folly, and he had likened the godly man to a

tree, deep-rooted, fixed and fruitful through drought and storm. He drove home the contrast by calling the ungodly chaff, the helpless plaything of a puff of breeze, producing nothing, impermanent, futile.

While MacIvor prayed the words echoed in Jane's mind, lifting against her will the picture of Sheppard Gail—the man who hated the land in which his roots might have struck deep, who dreamed of idle wanderings in far places, pursuing only the pleasure of his whim. Chaff, driven before the wind . . . trees planted by rivers of water. . . . Again, even in the measured, formal tone of prayer, she caught the effect of triumphant, unshaken faith.

She wondered whether by any chance MacIvor's philosophy could be right, whether there was a god who delighted to intervene in human quarrels, who helped those who, like MacIvor, asked no help until they had spent their strength and courage to the full. MacIvor and his grim god, against Sheppard Gail and his luck. . . .

Under Miss Drummond's roof there was the atmosphere of a fortress facing attack. All day, even when her thoughts were most intent upon her own concerns and the consequence of her haste and folly, Jane Gail had felt the tension of a joining fight, the

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presence of a major issue which, alien as it was, somehow lessened the importance of her own affairs. To-night, after the tight silence of the supper table, the awkward interval that followed before prayers, she had almost forgotten Jane Gail's problems as she watched MacIvor's face and read in it his acceptance of the challenge to do battle for his trees. Usually, after prayers, there were only brief good nights between these three. This evening, with the somber phrases of the psalm in her ears, Jane hesitated, aware of a need for speech.

"You're going to fight, David? You won't sell your timber?"

She saw the muscles tighten about his jaws. "I mean to fight," he said slowly. "And more than that, Mrs. Gail."

She winced at the final words. He had not once failed to use the formal address since she had come back, as if to remind her who and what she had chosen to be. But again her interest in the broader issue drew her thought from herself and her altered status in this household.

"You mean that you can win?"

"Just that. Before—" he seemed to trip on the name—"before the other side can levy their taxes

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on my trees they must hold a county vote and win consent to the new courthouse and the highways they have set up as their pretext. And I will beat them there."

"I thought—" she stopped in turn. It was going to be hard to discuss this thing, if they could not introduce the name of Gail. She took her resolve firmly. "I thought that the Gails controlled the county politics."

"True, by a narrow margin; but that is in the main because the folk who would oppose them have had small interest in such matters. Yonder in the hills are many who see eye to eye with me—small farmers, hard-driven to keep soul and body joined, who can ill spare a day's labor to cast a vote in which they have no great concern. Men of my blood, in part. They will stand by me in this. The Gails—" he stumbled again on the name—"the Gails will be cocksure."

He straightened, and the thin lamplight deepened the bitter lines of his face. Miss Drummond spoke dryly from the stair-foot.

"Be warned by them, then, Davie MacIvor, and vaunt yourself when you put off your harness. It is late for boasting, and over-early, too."

Jane followed her to the upper floor, where they separated with only a brief and formal good night. She felt alone and alien as her plight came home to her. Last night she had been too spent to think; throughout the day her thoughts had been diverted and preoccupied by other things, but now as she lay awake she found her mind clear and ordered, engaged with a new realization that, without knowing it, she had won something in this house, and then, as unconsciously, thrown it away, to evaluate it justly only now that it was lost.

During her weeks here she had become in some sense a member of a family, had been admitted to a footing very little like that on which she had been received again, after her desertion to the other camp. She was here, now, on a basis of formality, harbored only under the ancient, unwritten law of hospitality and asylum. Before, she had been part of it, welcome for her own sake, the object of a genuine regard on the part of these two people.

Shame came to her as she thought of how she had smiled in secret at their homely ways, a shame intensified and embittered by a companion memory of her readiness to accept Sheppard Gail's surface charm as a true index to the man himself. She

forced her thought away from him and back to Miss Drummond and MacIvor and the problem of her new relations with them both. She was sufficiently practical to realize the futility of regret when there was a definite and tangible difficulty facing her, demanding a working solution.

Fifty hours ago she had been sorry for herself because circumstances compelled her to live in this house, with these two. Now, soberly, she pondered on her chances of winning back her place in their regard, saw it, at last, as something once possessed, something lightly forfeited, something worth a stubborn effort to regain.

In this new light she came to understand more than the relationship which had existed between the three, to find a comprehension of things more fundamental—of the relative importance, in human life, of purpose and pleasure, of work and play.

The dull routine of the house and farm, that had oppressed and wearied her as she looked on at it, revealed itself now as touched with a rugged dignity. There was something fine and splendid even in Miss Ailie's passion for clean walls and floors, in her interest in details of pantry and kitchen. There was a homely splendor as of romance in MacIvor's blind,

obstinate devotion to his fields and timber. Strength—the word came to her with a new force and appeal, a quality that made other traits—those traits that had seemed so sufficient and important—now trivialities of little weight. The only thing worth being, she thought, was strong. If you were that, in the best sense, in David MacIvor's sense and Miss Ailie's, you would be everything else that mattered.

And if you were weak—again the picture rose of Sheppard Gail, alone with his bottle and his negro mute, of Warren Borden, paying with years of life for the comfort of a flabby, indecisive will, of Jane Gail herself, and the price that was still to pay for the weakness that had let her drift into intimacy with Sheppard Gail, that had surrendered lazily to a whim of impulse, rather than assert the little strength it would have needed to pause and to consider.

Before sleep came to her she had dealt mercilessly with herself. What she had received without earning at Miss Ailie's hands and at MacIvor's, what she had sacrificed without a thought, was to be reconquered now, as a debt due no less to them than to herself. She would live in this house no longer as a guest, gladly or reluctantly sheltered; she would pay her way in work, in loyalty, in understanding and

respect. A random word of MacIvor's reading came to her. "Thy people shall be my people and thy God, my God." She smiled in the darkness at the idea, but there was a reassuring comfort in the words and they seemed in some mysterious fashion to release her to the peace of sleep.

It was not easy. She found herself held stubbornly away from the work of the house, barred by a formal courtesy against which she made slow, toiling progress. Sometimes, as her efforts were rebuffed, she fancied that Miss Drummond was jealous of her duties, clung to them as to something precious which she would not share. There were times when it seemed as if she must be driven back upon herself and her unwelcome thoughts, but her resolve endured in the face of these discouragements; she held to the thought of that one magic word. She was strong; she would never be weak again.

Presently and slowly, as if the older woman yielded against her will, Miss Drummond's attitude relented, till there were times when Jane Gail could almost forget that their relationship had changed. Gradually she was allowed to look on and then to help in the housework which Miss Drummond lifted

to the dignity and interest of a profession. She began to understand something of the common sense that underlay even those activities that seemed most reasonless—the sober, practical necessity of cleanliness, the art of stern economy in little things, the trick of managing a pack of shiftless, naturally slattern servants, the craft of ordering a hundred minor tasks so that they merged into a single smoothly fluent stream of accomplishment.

But with David MacIvor she made no visible gain. She saw that he avoided her, now, deliberately and intelligently; they met at the table and at household prayers, always in Miss Drummond's presence, always separated by a barrier of unyielding reserve which resisted every effort on Jane's part to break it down. He spoke to her only when she made it necessary, and never without the needless repetition of her married name, as if he would remind himself and her that she had put herself, once for all, out of his kind and class.

The only perceptible lessening of his reserve was an increasing willingness to discuss the impending election in her presence, instead of waiting to talk with his aunt after Jane had gone to her room. Even in these three-cornered conversations, however,

he addressed Miss Drummond and ignored Jane except when she required him to answer a direct question. But she was patient, and she saw, in time, that he was beginning to grow at least accustomed to her presence, less on guard against her. His anxiety over the coming struggle preoccupied him more and more, so that he talked of it with an increasing freedom and frankness, as he returned from his electioneering among the Scots farmers on whom he counted for his defense.

"They are ill cattle to drive," he told Miss Drummond, after a long day's absence in the hills, "and they see the near penny before the distant shilling. I have talked to little purpose this day, Aunt Ailie."

Miss Drummond bit a thread deliberately. "You have less tongue-gift than most, Davie MacIvor. I am thinking that you'll be better at the farming and the fighting. And that's a pity, too, when a limber tongue can spare a man more than a ready hand." She sighed. "There's whiles, Davie, when I wonder what the Lord God was thinking of, to leave the gift of gab out of all men except the kind that have little else. It's a grand pity he did not make Eve first, and have the benefit of her advice while he was making Adam."

David MacIvor laughed, and the sound of it startled Jane Gail, so that she looked up from her sewing basket in blank surprise. It came to her that she could not remember having heard him laugh before, and her conception of MacIvor underwent, in that moment, a considerable readjustment. He became for the first time wholly human.

"If he had made you first, Aunt Ailie, I'm thinking there would have been no want of advice, at all events," he said.

"There would not," said his aunt emphatically. "Not that I would be criticizing, you understand. No doubt he did the best he could, but there's no denying that a good canny woman would have managed better in some of the deetails."

MacIvor laughed again and his eyes met Jane's with a glint of wholly secular amusement. It was like meeting another person, Jane thought; she wondered whether, under the gravity he wore so patiently, he was hungry, like other men, for honest mirth. For a moment she felt far older and wiser than he; there was something pathetic in that half-shamed lapse into laughter, as if MacIvor had been forced into his solemnity against his wish, by outer strains and pressures.

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She saw him, now, as the product of the harsh, distracting influences that must have surrounded him from birth—a man driven in upon himself, warped and twisted from his natural bent by an inherited and ruling idea, his laughter, like his youth, sacrificed to the timber, until the thought of it had become a dominant, obscuring force. It was absurd that a few square miles of standing pines should be held so all-important, that a man's life could count for so little in the balance against his woods. Given a normal environment MacIvor might have been as light-hearted as anybody, as Sheppard Gail, even—she shrank back from the comparison. MacIvor, under stress of circumstance, would never have been like Gail. But her wakened compassion prompted her to unconsidered speech.

"David, sometimes I almost hope they'll vote against you," she said. "It seems horrible that a man like you should spend himself as you do on a patch of woods! If they beat you, you'll have to let the timber go—have to take the money for it—and no matter how you hate it, there'll be compensations. If you win, you'll just go on like this—wearing yourself out to save your trees."

He was instantly grave again. "I have heard

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that same from Aunt Ailie, Mrs. Gail. I thought that it was clearer to you—my reason for sparing the timber. I am not blind, for all the love I feel for my woods. With these hands I have cut many and many a pine. It is not trees that I would save, but a forest.”

“But a forest is nothing but a great many trees,” she interrupted. “I don’t see—”

“The forest is the living thing, composed, to be sure, of many trees, but something more than just that, too. I do not know if I can make it clear, but it is as though the forest were likened to a man, and the trees to the cells of his body. It is easy for the man or the forest to heal even sore wounds, so long as life endures, but once life is gone, there can be no healing. Trees spring up, grow old and die, but the forest, unless we kill it, goes on forever.”

“Of course. I can see that. But the point is that I don’t see why it should go on forever. Somebody will cut down those woods, some day, even if you manage to keep them as long as you live, and it seems a shame that you shouldn’t have the good of the money.”

“If I have my will of it, Mrs. Gail, no man will ever clear those woods of mine. Give me but the

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five good years, or better ten, and I can make so much sure, at least. For those woods are the hidden reservoir of all our streams; they give up their stored moisture slowly under the sun and let it fall again as rain—”

“I know about that,” she broke in eagerly. “I know that when your woods are gone these sand-hills will be a barren desert. But what else are they now? Nothing grows here—the land, even with your woods standing, is worthless.”

He laughed. Again she was surprised and pleased by the sound of it.

“You say that, when you have seen my young peach-trees? Worthless, barren land yields no such growth, Mrs. Gail. Land of any sort is like a machine, in which water and sunlight and death are mingled to breed new life. Richer soils, to begin with, hold more plant food than our sand, but rich or poor, all soils must be fed before they yield, as a machine is fed. The sun lies warm on these hills for nine months of every twelve, and one mule can pull a plow through new ground. As long as we have water, and if the sand is fed and cultivated wisely, there is no farming country in the world that can be more fertile.”

For a moment the earnestness of his tone and word convinced her, and then she remembered a careless comment of Sheppard Gail's.

"You've been thinking so for years and years, but the land is still barren, isn't it?"

"I had to learn, like other men. My first trees died for want of proper feeding; another experiment was wasted for lack of means to fight the borers and curculio. I forced another orchard over-fast, and a hard winter killed the spongy wood. But I have learned, now. This summer I shall ship away sound fruit, and take from every crate the profit on a pine tree. Let these people see me do just that, a year or two, and they will need no preaching to persuade them. You will see these bare hills, where the timber has been wasted, green again under great orchards; you will see the roads and schools you talk of, and thrifty farms feeding strong men and their sons where now there is scant pasture for wild swine."

He sobered. "You will see these things, that is, if I can save my timber and the water-springs it feeds. If they can force the timber to the saws, then we shall have here a desert indeed."

Jane yielded to the certainty of his voice. Gradually, at their meal-time meetings, she led him on

to elaborate his theory, until she came to understand something of the reasoned logic behind the farming processes that had seemed witless and wasteful; the cover crops that were plowed under in the spring, the heavy expense for fertilizers, the cattle that were supported at a seeming loss each year. And she saw, too, that his efforts to enlist the support of his friends in the hill district were unsuccessful. They were too narrow of vision to understand as MacIvor did. One of them, a lean, gaunt-jawed farmer who stopped for dinner let her see the attitude of all.

David MacIvor had counted on this man, Thomas Gilchrist, as a weight and influence in the farther edges of the county, and Jane saw that it was a sore disappointment to him when Gilchrist declared point-blank and determinedly that he would vote for the bond issue.

"It's natural that you should be against it, MacIvor. You and your timber must pay your just share of such costs, and it will be large, in course. That is but fair. The heavier burden should fall on the stronger shoulder. You have held your pines untaxed through all these years while their value has increased and multiplied. Now it is but common justice that you should pay a little."

MacIvor's argument fell on dry ground. Gilchrist had farmed the hill sand over-long to be persuaded of its possibilities. He shook his head stubbornly at talk of peach-trees, and departed, at last, after something like a quarrel. Throughout his stay at the Drummond house he had avoided direct speech with Jane, although she tried, again and again, to draw him into talk with her. Once or twice, when she met his eyes, she read in them a visible disfavor which angered and puzzled her at once. When he had gone, Miss Ailie attacked her nephew's position with sudden venom.

"Now maybe you'll believe that the election is to go against you, Davie MacIvor, and send word, like a sensible body, to the timber buyers. You can ding the Gails yet, if you will, man! By the time their tax-gatherers come down on you, there need be no stick of timber left for them to levy on, and the money in a sure place, out of their reach."

MacIvor shook his head slowly. "I am not beaten, Aunt Ailie, even if they carry the county against me. I will fight them farther than they think, and harder, it may be, too. I am breaking three hundred acres of new land, and in four years I shall have fruit enough to carry taxes on my timber and some-

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thing to spare, beside. I shall ding them, as you say, but in my own time and my own way, laying ax to no pine tree to do it."

He left the table without waiting for her answer. She followed him with a glance of amiable exasperation, the corners of her thin, firm lips trembling a little.

"There's whiles when I itch to take the flat of my hand to the lad." She suffered her lips to relax to a reluctant grin. "And again there's whiles when I tell the Lord God it was a grand day's work for Him when He got Davie MacIvor on His side."

XIII

THE sound of hoofs in the drive broke the expressive silence which lay between the women under the hanging lamp. Miss Drummond lowered her sewing to her lap and straightened to listen, her head tilted.

"That will be Davie MacIvor," she said. "And by the pace he rides he'll be fetching ill news of the vote."

She carried a small glass lamp to the door and held it above her head. Jane resisted an impulse to follow and hear MacIvor's report at its first telling. She was again conscious of standing outside this quarrel, of being an intruder, welcome, perhaps, in victory, but barred from the closer intimacy of defeat. It was hard enough to be beaten—for this defeat would strike at her as cunningly as at MacIvor himself—without being denied her share in the common regret. She was at the stair when MacIvor came in, and against her will she turned to read his news in his look.

She saw instantly that he had lost.

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"Oh, David—I'm sorry!"

He inclined his head gravely. "I made sure of so much, Mrs. Gail, without the telling."

Miss Drummond closed the door and set her lamp on the table. She was voluble with questions. MacIvor answered soberly, without passion or heat.

"They had twenty-eight votes to spare," he said. "No more than that." His face tightened to a new grimness. Miss Drummond, for some reason that Jane could not fathom, glanced briefly at her and back at her nephew before she spoke again.

"Then the hill farmers did not stand with you?"

Jane observed that MacIvor, too, glanced at her before he answered, as if there were some connection, invisible to her but apparent to both the others, between those dour Scots hill folk and Jane Gail.

"Thomas Gilchrist worked hard for the Gails," he said slowly. "It was their vote—the Gilchrists and Ogilvies and Camerons—that carried it."

Miss Drummond nodded. "I thought as much. There never was a Gilchrist could see beyond the hawk's neb of him, nor a Cameron that was not easy led by the same handle. Well, what's by is by, Davie. And there's this to think of—they've done themselves as ill a service as they've done to

you. When the timber's gone, they'll curse this day, and serve them right."

"The timber's far from going, election or none, Aunt Ailie. They've still to beat me. Let them clap on their tax till they weary—I'll pay it."

Below the stubborn defiance of the words Jane felt a flat weariness, new in her experience of the man. Manifestly Miss Drummond heard it too.

"You're far spent, Davie, and you'll be the better for your bed. We can do without prayers, this one night, I'm thinking."

"It's the one night when I'll be needing them most," he said evenly. Again his glance moved to Jane and seemed to give her opportunity to escape if she should wish. She came quickly back to her chair, instead. He opened the big Bible with no hesitation for the place, and the weariness was gone from his voice as he read, the language of the psalm strangely natural on his lips. Listening, it dawned on Jane that this man's speech had actually been formed by the starkly simple Saxon of the King James text. He spoke, by habit, in this same idiom he read.

"Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me;

thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. . . . Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies. . . . My cup runneth over. . . . Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life. . . .”

She carried upstairs with her a persistent, unreasonable conviction that this man had not been beaten. Through the board floor she could hear a low-toned conversation, and again the feeling that she was alien to the household depressed her. MacIvor had kept something back, something that he would not let her hear, and yet would share willingly enough with his aunt. She remembered how they both had glanced at her, when the defection of the Gilchrists and their clans had been mentioned, and once more she felt the presence here of some association that connected her with those hard-headed hill farmers, almost a sense of reproach, which persisted in the face of her logical self-acquittals. It was still in her thoughts when she came down in the morning.

MacIvor had already ridden abroad on his farm business, and the two women breakfasted alone, in silence except when Jane forced a moment of talk. She did her share of the housework, still troubled

by the feeling that some change had come over the relations of the household since yesterday, a change not to be explained by the defeat at the polls. Toward ten, when there was an interval in her daily routine, she went out to the garden, responding by instinct to a mellow spring sun, the spiræa and forsythia in bloom, the song of the mockers thrilling from the gables. It was impossible not to yield a little to the reassurance of reviving, passionate nature; she thought of Pippa and her song, the year that was at spring, the God who was in His heaven and the world with which all was well. And, with the words rising to her lips, she looked up to see Sheppard Gail cantering toward her down the drive.

She stood very still, waiting for him, aware that something had shadowed the sun and turned the bird-song flat and sardonic in her ears. He saw her, waved to her, as gayly as in the days of their old, light-hearted companionship, and swung down before the hedge with a cheerful greeting in his former tone, as if all that had come between them had been forgotten, had never happened.

She did not answer. An ache came to her throat, as at something beautiful and young and cherished, that had died, as needlessly as such things always

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seem to die, as cruelly. It was like seeing a ghost of romance, as if the man she had seemed to love, the man she knew had never lived, were here before her, smiling the same abashed, appealing smile that she had all but forgotten and yet remembered so mercilessly well.

"Good morning, Jane." He stood still, holding his horse's bit. "Don't shoot— I'm under a flag of truce."

"If you want to see Mr. MacIvor—"

"I don't. I never did like his company, Jane, and this morning I'm plumb prejudiced against it. I rode over to talk to you."

"There is nothing to talk about, between us," she said evenly. "You've wasted your ride."

"I can afford to waste a lot of riding, Jane, and maybe there's more to talk about than you think. I want you should come back. That's why I'm here."

She did not even shake her head, watching him as if she had not heard.

"Don't take it thataway, Jane. Wait till I tell you. You saw me when I was—drunk. You think that's how I really am, all the time. I'm not blaming you for that. Folks keep saying that a man

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ain't ever his real self till he's drunk. It ain't so, of course. A drunk man's poisoned; if there's one time when he ain't himself, it's then. But I don't look for you to believe that—not yet, anyhow. I got to prove to you that I ain't that kind of a man, inside me. And that's why I come, Jane—to get my chance to prove it.”

She did not answer, but the plea reached her. She remembered Warren Borden. Surely the man who had degenerated under disease and poison in his last months was not the real man, there, the man she had trusted and loved all her life. And she had, for a little space, loved this man who stood in the path before her.

“I want you should come back home, Jane, and leave me prove it to you, the only way I can. Wait—” he moved a hand as the refusal rose to her lips—“that's all I want—I know I got to win you back, all over again, and I aim to do it. But it's different, now we're married. I can't hold up my head before my own folks, the way things stand now. I'm shamed, Jane. But if you come back, you'll be just as safe from me as if you stayed right here with Miss Drummond. You got to take my word for that, but you can do it, Jane. You

think I want a wife I got to take by force, a wife 't hates me? Well, I don't, nor any other man I ever knew about. That's story-book talk, Jane. Real folks don't feel thataway. I'm asking you to come back home and stay there, like a guest in my house, till I prove to you what kind I am, one way or the other. That ain't asking so much, is it? When you promised so much more?"

She shook her head without speech.

"You won't, Jane? Why not? You afraid to take my word?"

"I haven't any reason to trust it," she said slowly, "but it's not so much that. I'm not thinking about myself. I'm thinking—about—about these people here. Twice they've taken me in when I had nowhere else to go, made me welcome, without question or condition. Now, when they're in trouble, I couldn't leave them if I wanted to, and I don't want to. I like them both. I trust them. I—"

He nodded gravely. "I know. You think I'd have left you stay here a minute, if I didn't know what kind of folks they are? Think I'd have stood for being laughed at, the way I have, if I wasn't sure how they treated you? If you didn't feel like that about both of 'em, Jane, they'd be something

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wrong with you. But you don't see it right, all the same. If you aim to do Dave and his aunt a favor, the biggest one you can do is to come with me, like I say."

Her eyes widened in question and doubt. He nodded soberly.

"I sort of figured I'd have to *make* you come home, after what you saw, that night, Jane. That's why I worked so hard to beat Dave in this tax business—I'm owning up to you, Jane, putting my cards right on the table. This is no time to lie. I needed a club and I got one. I've got Dave where he can't hit back."

She shook her head at this, but he did not wait for her denial in words.

"Oh, he'll try to fight back, sure enough, but it's no use. We got him cold, Jane. And it's up to you to say whether he goes under or stays up, that's all. I only want one thing, now. I'm all through wanting money and what money'll buy. I only want you, and I got to have you. I got to have my chance to prove that I ain't like what you think, Jane. And if you feel you owe MacIvor something, you can pay him back by doing like I say. If you'll come home, I'll leave Dave alone—leave

him hang onto his timber till he drops. They won't be any new courthouse nor highways nor taxes."

"And if I stay here?"

"Then I aim to break him, like I can, if you make me, if they's no other way I can have my chance to show you what I am. I'd do more than that, before I'd leave you go, but I'd hate to, Jane. I feel like I owed Dave a good turn, too—the way he's treated you. I'd like for to pay him back by leaving him hang on to his pines and fuss with his peaches. But I'll break him, if you say I got to."

In spite of herself the threat warmed her. She had cared for this man, after months of close and friendly comradeship; on one isolated experience of what he could be when drugged and poisoned by bad whisky, she had discarded all her earlier opinions and beliefs concerning him. It seemed clear, now, that he was not what she had first thought him, and also that her second decision had been wrong, too.

"How could I trust you to carry out your bargain, if I agree?" she said slowly. "I'd only have your word—and I don't know how good it is. You see I'm being quite frank, too."

"That's what I want, Jane. I don't blame you.

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A man 't drinks too much ain't responsible. But you got me, anyhow. If I don't keep my bargain, all that happens is I lose you again and for keeps. I can't hold you by force, even if I wanted to. You don't promise me a thing. If I can't convince you, I lose—and either way Dave MacIvor wins."

She shook her head again. "I can't. I won't. It would be too mean, too contemptible, to desert them now, on the chance that you'll do as you say. I've got to stand by."

"And what good is that going to do Dave? What use can you be to him in a fight like this? You're just one more weight on his neck—one more to feed and think about. You don't see it straight, Jane, or you'd never 've come back here in the first place. You don't realize what you let Dave in for, when you come back."

"I don't see—" she began, puzzled. He leaned toward her.

"No, you don't. You don't see that when Dave MacIvor took you in, he signed a permit for me to kill him any time or place I pleased, without even facing a trial for it. You don't see 't ever since you been here Dave's been waiting for a bullet to hit him in the back, knowing that he had

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it coming to him, that any jury would say so, even in the north. You can't take a man's wife away from him without risking that, and Dave he knows it as well as I do. And Dave thinks he knows I'm the kind to shoot him in the back, too."

She straightened. Many things became clear to her now. Gail was right. MacIvor had known, all along, that he was a fair target for a shot from ambush; Miss Ailie had known it, even better than he. And in spite of it, they had let her stay, made her welcome, kept her from guessing what they feared might be the price of that sanctuary! Minor incidents, tones, looks, silences were suddenly explained in the light of this new understanding.

She recoiled from a realization of her thoughtless selfishness in thrusting herself again upon Miss Drummond's household. She had been, all through the fight, nothing but a burden and a risk; without her to complicate his problem it was even possible that MacIvor might have won in that election—she might easily have been the unconscious cause of his defeat. She plunged half blindly to a decision. Perhaps it was because of her that Gilchrist and the other hill farmers had deserted MacIvor.

"I'll come, on your terms," she said crisply. "If you'll wait, I'll ride over with you now."

"I'll wait, sure enough," he said. She turned from him abruptly, hating him more and despising him less, stimulated by a new sense of adventure and a strange, warming consciousness of sacrifice and atonement. She was paying some measure of her debt, at least and at last; there would be difficulty, danger perhaps, in the course she was resolved to follow; there was immediately before her the certainty that her action would be misconstrued by Miss Drummond and MacIvor. Somehow this pleased her; she would have no applause for what she did, and could not accuse herself of playing, so to speak, to the galleries. She reached her room without encountering Miss Drummond, and was glad of this; she wanted to defer her announcement until she was ready to leave, so that there would be no room for argument, no chance for explanations.

While she packed, swiftly and with method, she found her purpose steadily gaining in strength. Whatever mistakes she had to regret, she was making none in this. She was unreasoningly sure that Sheppard Gail would keep to the letter of his word, that she had nothing to fear at his hands; there

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was even a remote and reluctant pride in the certainty that he wanted her respect and love more than he desired anything else, that, on the far chance of regaining what he had lost with her, he would forego his profit and his triumph at David MacIvor's expense. She understood him well enough to realize the significance of this new attitude, and in spite of her feeling toward him there was a pleasure in the knowledge that, whatever he was, however contemptible, he loved her and wanted her with all his might.

She came downstairs with her traveling bag as David MacIvor entered from the gallery, and with his grave nod toward her, turned at once to speak to his aunt who had stood at the window. Jane saw instantly that Miss Drummond had seen Sheppard Gail at the gate, that MacIvor was not aware of his presence. She was glad that she could make her announcement to them both; each, in some fashion, protected her against the other. She spoke quietly.

"I've decided that I must go back to—to my husband." The final word needed a conscious effort. Both faces turned to her, MacIvor's blank and startled, Miss Ailie's touched with a shrewd

inquisitive look in which Jane saw no trace of surprise. It was Miss Ailie who spoke first.

"I was wondering when you would find it out, Jane." She nodded, as if the news pleased her by justifying some secret prediction of her own. The tone startled Jane; she had a flash of alarm under that penetrating gaze; Miss Ailie had guessed at something dangerously near the truth. There was in the girl a sharp fear lest the plain-spoken lady blurt out her suspicions in MacIvor's presence.

"I ought to have found it out long ago," she said slowly. "You must both try to forgive me, if my going seems like deserting, because you've both helped to make me understand that there's such a thing as duty in the world. I never realized that till I came here."

MacIvor's face hardened. Jane was sorry for him as she saw the conflict that the word set up in him. There was a little silence, while she avoided Miss Drummond's glance. Then MacIvor found his voice.

"I should be the last to reason against a duty, Mrs. Gail. But there is a duty to self, I take it, as well as to a—husband. I would have you make no second error here. Your conscience is your own, and

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no other can speak for it, but I say truly that unless you will it so, no duty lies on you to—”

“Then you must think that it is also my wish, David.” She met his eyes frankly. “I feel that I must go back.”

Again she seemed to see the struggle of opposing forces within the man.

“I will put it on another footing, then. There is here a duty, since you choose that word, to my aunt, that I think you overlook. She has been no such ill friend to you that you need not now consider her.”

“I do not overlook it, David—nor the gratitude I owe to you, as well.” Jane’s voice steadied on the phrase. “You must believe of me what you will, but I have had time to think and this is no hasty step. I know the cost quite well—yes, and the gain, too.”

The word seemed to strike him like a blow. He straightened and stiffened under it.

“There is no more to be said, then.” He bowed. “We have no claim that will stand between you and your—pleasure.”

“The word in your teeth, Davie MacIvor!” Miss Drummond’s tone warmed Jane. “Fine you know

that Jane's place is with her man—her man that she took for worse or better. I take shame for you that will make the doing of her duty a sorer task than it need be. Pleasure, says you? And for whose pleasure would you have her stay? Hers or mine, or maybe yours?"

Jane saw a slow color under the sunburned skin. "I am well rebuked, Mrs. Gail," he said slowly. "I had no right—"

"You have every right, David," she cut in. "It would be a poor return for all your friendship if I could not hear a word of counsel, kindly meant. But I know that I am right to go."

Miss Drummond kissed her on the cheek. It was the first sign of affection she had shown since Jane's return, and it heartened the girl. There was no need of spoken explanations here; this woman understood; she did not protest because David Mac-Ivor came first in her love; for his sake she would have immolated herself even more willingly than she would accept another woman's sacrifice on his account, but she knew what Jane had meant when she spoke of cost and gain, as clearly as Jane herself had known.

"You'll remember that my house is always yours,

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dearie," she said, "the more blithely for this that you're doing." She glanced at the window and her face showed a gleam of grim humor. "I'm thinking you'll guide your gear none so ill. You'll have learned a bittock here."

And something of that indomitable bent for finding the humor beneath even tragedy seemed to pass from her to Jane, so that she went out to her husband with an aloof, detached amusement at the hint that he could be subdued and managed by the means which had served Miss Drummond in the subjugation of MacIvor.

XIV

JANE was quite sincere in her welcome when Latham, restored to his butler's dignity, brought Harley Gail into the candle-lit dining room where she sat at supper with her husband. Of all the Gails she liked this red-faced, jovial sheriff best; always, in her presence, he was boyishly ill at ease, avoiding her eyes and surveying his cousin with a respect visibly and comically based on his acquisition of herself as wife. She found his awkwardness an agreeable change from the careful, silken diplomacy of her husband; Harley seemed to bring a gust of boisterous fresh wind into a room of artificialities. Never, when she was alone with Sheppard Gail, could she rid herself of the feeling that they were both pretending, dissembling, playing parts in a drama of which she could not foresee the climax.

She saw that Sheppard Gail was not pleased at the interruption, and admired the finesse with which he permitted her to draw this inference without allowing Harley to suspect it. The sheriff refused her suggestion that he share the simple dessert, but ac-

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cepted a chair and crossed his booted legs, fiddling uneasily with the broad-brimmed black felt hat which was his insignia of office. He listened to Sheppard's brisk talk with the air of a man who waits submissively for his turn to speak. Jane glanced at her husband and felt again the old doubt of him, the persisting sense of pretense and artifice which colored all their relations. He was talking, she thought, for some ulterior purpose of his own, and presently she guessed that it was to prevent his cousin from saying whatever it was that he had plainly come to say. She took a mild satisfaction in defeating his intention.

"I'm sure the sheriff didn't trouble to ride all the way from Tyre just to hear about the hounds, Sheppard. He wants to tell us something, if you'll only give him a chance, don't you, Sheriff?"

"Yes 'm. Harley grinned gratefully in her direction, still without meeting her eyes quite squarely. "Rode over to tell Shep 't Dave MacIvor's done put a plaster on his timber-lands at last. Mortgage come in to the county clerk for record this evening. Figured you'd want to know, Shep."

"I'd have been a sight more interested a while back, Harley, than I am now." Sheppard Gail

pushed back his chair, flinging a quick smile at Jane. "I been sort of losing interest in Dave, lately."

Jane saw a frown contract the red forehead. Harley Gail looked bewildered.

"I figured different, Shep. He's done raised enough cash to pay any taxes we can levy on his woods, and it sure looks like he'd be able to hang on to the timber for a right long spell."

Sheppard rose quickly. "Harley, I hate to talk business when I got something better to do. Kind of make it a rule that my wife don't get bothered with it. But you might as well know right now that it don't matter to me how long Dave MacIvor keeps his timber out of the mills. We ain't going ahead with the courthouse this year, anyhow, and maybe not ever. So they won't be any new taxes for anybody to pay."

Harley Gail's pink brows arched in blank question. "But the county done voted to build the courthouse, Shep."

"Voted to leave the commissioners go ahead with it if they wanted to. The act ain't mandatory, Harley—only empowering. And I been thinking this thing over and talking it over with Jane, here, too. It looks to me like we'd be plumb foolish to

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take and put up a big new courthouse when the old one's plenty good enough and big enough. No sense in wasting the taxpayers' good money, Harley."

"I figured it was mainly to get old Dave's timber on the move, Shep—"

"Maybe that was part of it." Sheppard Gail grinned again. "But Dave and me ain't fighting any, right now. That's all squared up. I been fixing to tell the commission before the next meeting. You might as well know now."

Harley shook his head. "They ain't going to like it, Shep. Mighty set on it, the boys."

"Reckon they can stand it, all the same. Anyhow, that's how it is, Harley."

The sheriff pondered visibly. "Dave don't know it, I reckon, or he wouldn't be raisin' money up to Raleigh and mortgagin' them woods to do it. Must be payin' a sight of interest on that there money."

"That Dave's business," said Sheppard curtly. "Let's go in the other room."

It was clear that he hoped Jane would accept the chance to escape the conversation. She had made it evident enough that she preferred to avoid these family conferences. But she preceded him into the

living room, now, as if no other idea had entered her mind. Under her encouragement Harley Gail told the amount of the mortgage and the name of the bank that had lent the money, her husband's dislike for the topic becoming steadily more manifest until, under the effect of his manner, his cousin took a reluctant departure. When he had gone, Gail faced his wife.

"I don't want to complain, Jane, but you make things kind of hard for me, sometimes. Everybody knows how you run off, that night, and went over yonder to Dave's place. It's liable to start a fool like Harley talking again, when you act so interested in Dave's affairs. Wait—" he lifted his hand as she would have interrupted— "I don't mind your *being* interested. It's right you should be, the way Dave treated you. Only when you show it, a fool like Harley is mighty apt to figure—"

"I'm not in the least afraid of what he thinks, Sheppard." She spoke evenly. "I make no secret of my attitude toward Miss Drummond and Mr. MacIvor."

"I'm not asking that you should, Jane." He was patient as she could not have believed he would be. Not once, since her return to his house had he shown

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even a hint of anger or resentment, and in spite of her distrust of him, she found it increasingly difficult to resist the appeal of him. It was hard to reconcile this new phase with her memories of that enlightening evening when she had fled from a totally different Sheppard Gail.

"I'm making no secret of mine, either. I'm Dave's friend now. I'd always have been his friend if he'd have let me. If I went to break him, like you know I did, it was to get you back here, so's I'd have my chance to show you I ain't what you thought I was. I reckon I been proving that, ain't I?"

She laughed softly. "Sheppard, you're awfully plausible. I'll concede that. But I don't forget that you're under compulsion, in a sense. If it's true that you want me more than anything else, then you've got to do what you've been doing, because if you don't, I'll go away again and you know it. So I can't give you full credit for doing it of your own free will, you see."

"That's right, Jane." He nodded, smiling. "But I reckon I can prove it now, sure enough. I don't have to fix things so Dave MacIvor'll know he's safe, do I? I could leave him go on paying interest

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on that money he's raised, couldn't I? Well, I ain't going to. I'm going to show him that he can give it back, any time he wants."

"How?" She was interested now. "You can't suppose that he'd take your word for it, surely. He'd only think it was another scheme to outwit him."

"He sure would, Jane. That's so. But when the commission votes against going ahead with the courthouse and the new roads, I reckon he'll know. They'll vote so's they can't go ahead, not for a couple of years, anyhow. I got it all fixed up. Figured I'd tell you when it was done, but Harley went and made me show my hand ahead of time."

She studied him alertly, her suspicions lessening as he met her eyes. She liked to think, these later days, that she could tell when he was sincere and when he was not, and she felt intuitively that he spoke the truth, this time. He honestly intended to relieve David MacIvor of whatever anxiety he might feel on the score of the timber.

She knew, of course, that he did this thing through no real friendliness toward MacIvor. Her intuitions and her common sense both told her that he was not and could never be MacIvor's friend, that

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he had hated MacIvor before Jane Borden ever came to the sandhills, and that he would go on despising him until they died, but this knowledge only heightened the significance of his present act. For her sake, for the sake of gaining even a little credit in her sight, he was definitely abandoning the advantage he had gained, releasing his enemy finally from the trap he had so carefully set and sprung. She was touched. Whatever else was false about this man, there was no doubt of his attitude toward her.

"That's really fine of you, Sheppard," she said with a trace of warmth. "I see, now. Of course I know you hate him, but that makes it all the finer of you."

She could see his eyes glow in the candlelight and a pang of fear stabbed at her lest she had gone too far. His hands closed and the knuckles whitened as if he fought with himself.

"I'd take and cut off my head, Jane, if it would make you believe how I feel about you." Again there was a singing note in his tone. "You reckon I'm the kind to want you just the way a man wants a woman? If I was that kind, you reckon I could stand it, living like this, seeing you all day, knowing that you're mine? I ain't, Jane! You got to be-

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lieve that! I'm proving it to you, every minute—proving that it—ain't just you I want—I want you when you feel like I do. I ain't standing this hell for a woman, not even for you, Jane—I'm standing it for—I don't know rightly how to say it. It sounds funny, but it ain't, Jane. I'm doing it because I want—love!”

His voice dropped on the word. Her fear died as quickly as it had come. She need never be afraid of him, she knew, unless, as before, the man himself should be drugged and poisoned by liquor.

“I'm fool enough to hope that some day I'll get it, Jane.”

She hesitated. “You had it once,” she said quietly.

“Do you mean you see any chance that I'll have it again?” He was on his feet suddenly, but he did not move toward her.

“I don't know,” she said slowly. “But I can say this, at least—you're following the only course that would ever make me forget—make me dare to believe and trust and respect you again. Good night, Sheppard.”

She left him standing at the table, his hand

clenched on the ruddy wood, the candlelight throwing strange shadows on his tense, thin face. In her room she wondered, with a sense of helplessness, of fatality, what was to be the end of this. It was as if her future lay beyond her power to control and form, as if she drifted in a current that carried her toward some invisible, unknowable shore. And she drew back, a little frightened, from the dismaying discovery that she could forget the past, that it was possible that some day she would trust and love this man again. Unreasoningly, as she lay awake in the darkness, the knowledge shamed her; if that day ever came Jane Gail would have bought happiness at a dear price in something that she could not now define or name, but which seemed to her finer, more precious than happiness itself.

In the morning, however, she was reassured. By daylight, manifestly concerned with the all-important petty routine of the kennels and stables, genial, amusing, persistently deferential, Sheppard Gail seemed poor stuff of which to manufacture a romantic villain. She was inclined to laugh at the memory of her last night's reflections; she was imagining traits that did not exist, inventing reasons against the appeal which she could not help finding in him.

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"Reckon I can't ride with you this morning, Jane," he told her as he came in from the kennels. "Kind of expecting my cousin Ad—got to talk over railroad business with him. No need for you to stay home if you want to ride, though."

She was secretly pleased at the chance to choose her own route for her daily ride. She wanted to carry the news of Gail's decision about the courthouse to Miss Drummond; it seemed, somehow, as if she was entitled to bring that message in person, and she was homesick for Miss Ailie, after the weeks of separation, hungry for feminine company, for talk.

"I reckon you wouldn't feel like riding around to tell Miss Drummond we ain't going to build the courthouse, would you? Be good for you to keep on being friends with her, if you could. Reckon it's right lonesome for you, without any women-folks to talk to."

"Oh, I'd just as soon go there," she said quickly. "Miss Ailie isn't angry at me at all. I think she was glad that I came back. And I have been missing her. I like her."

"Then why don't you go over there oftener? If you think I'd mind—"

"I did," she told him, "but it wasn't only that. David—he felt that I deserted under fire, I suppose. He's very much displeased with me, and I haven't felt that I'd be welcome there, even if you didn't mind my going."

"You'll be welcome this time, sure enough," he chuckled. "No matter if they don't believe you, they'll be glad to hear about the courthouse. You go on over, Jane. It'll do you good."

The mute negro boy brought her saddled mare around the corner of the house and she went out, wondering at her divided mood. Nobody could have behaved better than Sheppard; not many husbands in his situation would have volunteered that suggestion. She was silly to cling to that suspicion of a hidden motive in everything he said or did, yet the distrust persisted. She found herself wondering whether, perhaps, he had made the suggestion to get her away from the house before his cousin Ad came over from the railroad office. Again she rejected the thought. If Gail wanted to discuss the affairs of the road in private he could have ridden over to the village himself without any need for concealment or evasion.

She was in better spirits, this morning, than she

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had known for days. Spring lay warm on the sand-hills, a forthright and indubitable spring that was honestly innocent of the fickleness that she had always felt in the northern season; there was an honest heat in the sun, a confident, assured exuberance of leaf and flower in the reviving woods, where great beds of wild phlox spread a delicate color under the scant shadows of the scrub oaks and blue and yellow lupins reared above the bunch-grass in the open spaces. She found a kind of reassurance in it all, another echo of Pippa's song, and presently, as she came out upon a ridge, she saw MacIvor's orchard as a kind of final proof that summer was almost come.

It was only a few days since these trees had spread a pink mist of bloom above the bare sand; now they were low mounds of dense green leafage, almost covering the ground that had looked so naked a month or two ago. She could see the fruit thick on the branches, so that they arched and drooped as if already weary under its weight. The sight thrilled her with a sense of magic; MacIvor's dream of transforming this wilderness into a fruiting paradise was coming true. Her mind moved forward, seeing the naked ridges clad in miles of trees like

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these, seeing the houses multiply and the land drawing back to it the people who belonged there as of right. And she felt, too, that she had a share in this accomplishment; it was partly through her that MacIvor was to have his chance. The thought rode pleasantly with her as she reached and passed the frontier of pines; she had a fancy that they were thanking her for the reprieve and a reciprocal affection for them stirred in her, so that they were touched with personality, made her think of tall, silent, patient men.

She was pleased and disappointed at once, when she reached the open door of the living room, to discover that MacIvor was at home. Miss Drummond came toward her with a brisk and cordial greeting, but her nephew was content to rise and bow with a stiff reserve that was close to hostility. Understanding, she could forgive, but it was to Miss Ailie rather than to the man that she spoke.

"I came over to give you good news. They aren't going on with the courthouse and roads, after all. I found it out last night."

She saw at once that neither was surprised. MacIvor repeated his short nod.

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"Yes. We have had word of it. But it was kindly of you to ride so far to tell us again, Mrs. Gail."

"You'll stay to dinner, Jane. I'm weary for the sight of you," Miss Drummond cut in quickly, with a side glance of disapproval at David. "And your news is none the less welcome for the fact that we've heard it before—be sure of that."

Jane wondered at herself for the ache that tightened her throat at MacIvor's manner. It was silly to mind the man's natural readiness to include Sheppard Gail's wife in his attitude toward Sheppard Gail himself. She was behaving like a child, to resent and regret his failure to respond, and yet, in spite of herself, she was hurt by the rebuff. She forced the cordiality of her tone, against the impulse to adopt MacIvor's own key.

"I wanted to make sure that you knew, David, because I'd heard that you'd mortgaged your woods. I thought you'd want to have them clear again as soon as ever you could and—"

"I'm obliged to you for so much interest in my affairs, Mrs. Gail." Again he bowed stiffly. "The more because my interest is opposed to your husband's and to yours."

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"To mine?" Her brows rose. "I can't see how under the sun—"

"Surely it is no secret that your holdings in the railroad would earn a pretty penny if I could be driven to cut my woods?" He did not smile. Miss Drummond interjected an impatient, wordless noise.

"Have done with your talk of business, Davie, man. Jane has ridden far to fetch you what should be good news. Leave it at that."

"And I have thanked Mrs. Gail for that service, Aunt Ailie." His eyes did not leave Jane's. "I am wondering if she undertook the errand of her own wish, or maybe by her husband's bidding."

Jane felt herself flushing. "I don't blame you believing that Sheppard is against you, David. He's given you cause. But this time you're wrong. It's really his doing—this decision not to go on with the improvements. And it's kindly meant."

He nodded. "Then it was his notion that you should fetch us the news, as I thought."

She steadied her voice with effort. "He knew it would give me pleasure to bring it."

"And no doubt he believed, too, that I would be quicker to put faith in such news if I had it from you instead of from him."

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In spite of her growing resentment, Jane felt a flicker of doubt. Gail was clever. If he wanted to deceive MacIvor he had chosen, in sending her, the best means at his command. But she thrust away the thought. Gail was playing for another gain, now; it was not MacIvor's timber that attracted him. He could have had his will in that, if he had chosen, with no need to beat about the bush, to mask his purposes.

"You're unjust to us both," she said. "You must see that, if you stop to think. What could Shepard have to gain by deceiving you about something that will be common knowledge in a day or two?"

He laughed grimly. "Since you ask the question, I will answer it in plain speech, Mrs. Gail. Your husband knows that I have now the money to meet his taxes when they are levied, and that the plan he laid against me must fail of its end on that account. It would suit him overwell if I might be persuaded to return that money, and be bare-handed when his commissioners decide to proceed, after all, with their new roads and buildings. But it pleases me to send him back a word he will not be expecting. Tell him, if you will, that I have borrowed for more purposes than one. I can not only pay

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his taxes, but can clear more land for peaches. In another four years I shall have near two thousand acres in bearing."

"It's true, Jane. The lad's gone clean daft at the last of it. After all these years, when he would not pledge one tree to borrow money, now he must stake the whole forest on a venture that no sane man would—"

"It will be good hearing for Sheppard Gail, Aunt Ailie." MacIvor still held Jane's glance. "If this venture, as you call it, fails, then he will have no need to build new courthouses to lay hands on my trees. The money lenders will make haste to sell them with no persuasion at his hands."

His tone changed. "I must be at my work. If I have seemed less grateful than you looked for, Mrs. Gail, it is because, like the old Trojans, I mistrust the Greeks even when they bring me gifts."

He bowed again and went out. Jane, staring blankly at the erect, uncompromising back, marveled at herself. She was not angry; she was only hurt, and below that pain she faced a reviving doubt of Gail that half justified MacIvor in his down-right speech.

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Turning, she encountered Miss Drummond's half-shut eyes, bright with exasperated amusement.

"We're both itching to argue with the flat of our hands, Jane, but it's small good, at the best of it. Yon's a true observe that God made men-bodies to the image and likeness of Himself, and it's for us women to let be. But it's illuminating to see them at it. Watching how Davie MacIvor must aye cure an ill affair by making it worse is a grand comfort when you see the Lord at the same silly business."

In spite of herself Jane laughed. It was not hard to reconcile Miss Drummond's absolute acceptance of David MacIvor's religion with the breath-stopping irreverence of her occasional word. She saw now that the older woman had no intent to be humorous, that she had stated what seemed to her merely a commonplace of natural history. Her God was so near and real and living that she could think and speak of Him as of a neighbor, regrettably denied the counsel of able-bodied kinswomen. Jane yielded to an impulse to encourage her in the train of thought.

"I don't know just what you mean by that," she said. Miss Ailie rose instantly to the challenge.

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"You know fine, Jane. I mean that when I see folks caught in tangles like silly flies in a web, I can take comfort by remembering that it's God making the troubles as bad as possible so it'll be worth His while to set all straight agin."

The idea drew Jane's fancy. "You really think that our mistakes and follies aren't our own fault, Aunt Ailie? That—"

Miss Drummond wagged her head. "Yon's a fine question for the minister bodies to settle. To a plain-witted old woman it looks clear enough that there's special cases where the Lord's finger's in the tangle. It's certain that Davie MacIvor, to look no farther, could never get his gear in such a complete and perfect muddle unless he had grand help." She hesitated. "Nor Sheppard Gail, either, if you come to that, nor—" she stopped short.

"Nor me?"

"You're a woman," said Miss Ailie dryly, "and I would not put it past you to have tangled your affairs with small assistance. But I'm thinking that you'll be fine and glad of help to put them smooth."

XV

THE highland road by which Jane Gail rode home led over successive ridges and crossed a wide plateau, where, in the earlier spring she had ridden to see the dogwoods snowy with their bloom. As she approached it now, the mellow sound of negro voices came to her, the distant ring of axes, and she was forewarned of the sight that waited for her when she reached the upland level.

She could see MacIvor on his rawboned white horse, a central dominating figure in a scattered gang of toiling blacks; it seemed to her as if all the energy of the scene had its actuating origin in that big, straight, still figure. There was an effect of haste and of accomplishment, too. Already a great strip of land lay bare of its scrub, the wood heaped in huge piles for burning, the clay of the subsoil showing in dull chromes and vivid lakes where old stumps had been uncovered for the fires that ate slowly into their resinous fangs and sent up thin spirals of acrid smoke. She stopped to watch, fascinated, in sudden sympathy with the dream that lay

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behind the straining mules at the stump-pullers, the sweating, shouting negroes swinging ax and spade. She half hoped that MacIvor would see her and ride toward her, but he seemed unaware of her presence until one of the workmen near him, straightening his back, paused to stare deliberately in her direction. MacIvor turned to follow the man's gaze, and bowed briefly before he went on with his work.

Again Jane wondered at her want of resentment, her willingness to accept at this man's hands what at any other's would have been an affront, to find excuses and explanations for him, and still to be hurt, unreasonably, by his persistent misunderstanding, as if it could matter to Jane Gail what David MacIvor might choose to think of her. She rode away, angry rather at herself than at him, irritated by the consciousness of a childish ache in her throat instead of the decent, superior, amused annoyance which was due her self-respect.

But the memory of the scene rode with her; there was excitement in it, the sense of something, in this lazy land, that was eager and swift and keen, of a man who faced odds with a dour pleasure in the difficulty of his task, who gambled with a kind

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of canny magnificence that somehow made Jane ashamed of having once admired men whose speculations involved nothing more than money, whose only personal share in their ventures was a casual attention to a chattering ticker. A kind of enthusiasm came to her; this was all genuine, elemental, natural; David MacIvor was that kind of man, too, above the artificial softenings and restraints of a complex civilization, or below them, it did not greatly matter which.

So preoccupied with the thought that she did not notice the buckboard hitched in the shade of the sycamores, she came quickly into the living room and stopped short, just beyond the threshold, startled by the presence of Adam Gail and another man, a stranger whom she instantly identified as from the north—a man as visibly out of place in this environment as David MacIvor would have been in a Wall Street office.

The three men got to their feet. Sheppard Gail presented the stranger with a manifest pride that Jane could not help liking in him; she was pleased, too, by the surprise in the northerner's glance, the deference in his tone. Adam Gail, as always, exhibited a depressed and melancholy taciturnity, a

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deep line scored between his brows even when he went through the motions of a smile.

"Mr. Caldwell's down from New York, Jane, and he aims to start back to-night, so I reckon we got to go ahead and talk business, if you'll excuse us."

Jane drew off her gloves. "Of course. Go right on. You don't mind my listening, do you?"

She saw a very faint shadow cross her husband's face, as if he did mind, but Caldwell spoke quickly, a touch of needless heartiness in his manner.

"We certainly don't, Mrs. Gail. It's very nice of you to be interested in a tiresome railroad matter. I'm afraid we'll bore you."

The word quickened Jane's faculties. She took the chair that Sheppard placed for her. "If it's the Dundee and Deep Creek road, I'm bound to be interested in it," she said easily. "I hold so much of the stock that—"

Caldwell's brows rose in obvious question, and she saw his eyes drop to a typewritten list on the table before him.

"I didn't know you were a stockholder, Mrs. Gail. Your name doesn't appear on this list of mine."

"It's probably there, though," she laughed. "I used to be Jane Borden and my father's interest, I know, was transferred on the stock books after his death."

"I see." Caldwell made a check mark with his pencil. "Then by all means we want you to listen. You have the largest individual interest in the road."

"Don't rub it in, Mr. Caldwell. She couldn't help it." Sheppard laughed shortly, and Caldwell showed even teeth in silent appreciation of the wry jest.

"My firm could have helped it," he said. "We've got ourselves to thank for our losses." He turned to Jane. "I suppose you know the circumstances, Mrs. Gail. We've advanced money, at different times, to keep the road running. That's our business—short-time loans on security that most bankers would find slightly speculative. And this time we seem to have been a trifle more optimistic than usual." He laughed again, in the fashion of one who feels it a duty to look pleasantly at a loss. "However, there seems to be a way, this time, that will let us all out without any bad bruises. That's why I'm here. We've found a firm that wants to buy the road outright, and I've come to talk it over with the stockholders."

Jane nodded but said nothing. Something in the tone and look aroused her antagonism not toward the man as much as toward the idea he suggested.

"If the sale can be arranged on a private basis," he continued, "we can get a price that will cover all outstanding indebtedness—that's where we come in, you see—and leave a neat little surplus to be divided pro rata among the stockholders."

"It's money dropping right out of the sky, Jane." Sheppard cut in quickly. "The best we-all had to expect was to get put into a receiver's hands any time Mr. Caldwell here took a notion to go after us. This way we stand to get a little dividend—nothing much, but a long sight better than a poke in the eye with a pointed stub!"

Jane nodded without removing her glance from Caldwell's face.

"I haven't lost faith in the road yet, Mr. Caldwell. I believe it's going to get back on a paying basis, some day. This country has a future, in spite of the way it looks now."

Caldwell smiled politely. "The trouble is that we have to do business in the present, Mrs. Gail, and my firm's been waiting pretty long for its interest, to say nothing of the principal that's also overdue.

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We've chosen not to foreclose our mortgages because we didn't want to be hard on the stockholders, but business is business, and this chance looks too good to pass up. The demand for bankrupt railroads isn't what you'd call brisk, at its best, and we're in luck to have this offer. I don't deny that my firm would hate to foreclose on your rolling stock, if it wasn't for a chance like this. I don't know where we'd sell those old engines and rattle-trap cars, nowadays. But if we take this offer, we'll get our money in full, and you'll all get a little something for your stock."

Jane reflected. Instinct warned her against the seeming advantages of the proposal. The man's elaborate frankness, Sheppard Gail's strange manner, Adam Gail's settled dejection, all combined to wake a vague suspicion in her.

"Evidently somebody else believes in the future of the country," she said, "or nobody'd want the road at any price."

"You see, Jane—" Sheppard began nervously, but Caldwell struck in across the speech with a comfortable chuckle.

"You misunderstand, Mrs. Gail. The buyers don't intend to operate the road—they want the

equipment and rails as junk, and they're willing to pay enough, as I said, to cover—"

"Oh!" Jane glanced at her husband, and fancied that she saw again the flickering shadow in his look. "I didn't understand that. If we sell, these people will tear up the rails and abandon the road altogether, will they?"

"Yes." Caldwell waved his hands. "There's really no sign of any big traffic in the future. I understand that there's a lot of timber left, but we're satisfied that it can't be put on the market at present, and even if it could be, the profits on hauling it out would be only a temporary affair. It's not worth waiting for."

"No, it's not." Jane smiled. "I don't think that timber will ever be on the market. But I disagree with you all the same. I think it's worth waiting a little longer to find out whether there isn't a possibility of profitable traffic for the road. Not in timber, but in fruit."

Caldwell shook his head. "We've looked into that, Mrs. Gail, and there isn't enough fruit in the whole length of the line to show a possible operating profit now or at any other time. Besides, this offer is really exceptional—it will let us all out in

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the clear. If we wait, my firm will probably have to take a loss on the forced sale of your equipment, which we can attach and sell, of course, whenever we choose. We don't like losing money, I'll admit, but we're also just human enough to hate to see other people lose it, and this offer means that we can not only save our own skins but do you people a good turn at the same time."

"Suppose the stockholders refuse to agree. What then?" Jane watched him intently. He spread his hands.

"There's no question of that, is there? With the stock that Mr. Gail represents and your holdings, you have—" he added swiftly— "you have almost sixty per cent of the stock."

"But suppose it, just the same. What would your firm do?"

"We'd have no choice—we'd have to attach your rolling stock and get what we could out of it, taking a deficiency judgment against the road for any balance in our favor."

"I see." The plan was already forming in Jane's mind. She knew that she and MacIvor between them could control the road. And she knew that, with his peach crop ripening on his young trees,

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MacIvor would never agree to any step that would deprive him of his outlet to the main line, sixty miles away. "That would take you some time, I suppose—the legal proceedings you'd have to go through. You couldn't tie up the road for a month or two, could you?"

"I don't know how the local law stands on that." Caldwell spoke now in a tone curiously like her own, the gracious, condescending flavor of his earlier speech completely gone, as if he subconsciously recognized that he was dealing here with somebody as businesslike as he.

"Well, it doesn't matter so much, anyway," she said. "I don't want the road closed just yet, even if it costs me my chance of getting something for my stock. I think that you're going to get convincing proof of the possibilities of this soil and climate within a month or two. I've just been watching Mr. MacIvor's men clearing land for new orchards. He's planning to plant another thousand acres this year."

"What?" Sheppard Gail was startled. "You mean it, Jane? A thousand acres more—why, Dave can't do it! It'd break him to start another hundred!"

"He has the money to finance this, Sheppard. He's using what he borrowed on his timber."

Gail whistled softly, a long, round note. "Well, talk about gamblers! For a man that would skin a nigra for shooting craps for pennies, Dave ain't such a piker himself! I always figured I had as much sporting blood as was good for a man, but I'd hate to be heavy on a million-to-one shot like that!"

"I think he doesn't consider it a gamble. After all, it isn't as if he hadn't anything to judge by. His present orchard is fairly good evidence that he has the right idea, isn't it?"

"He's a long way short of proving anything, Jane. It looks all right to you, because you don't know. But there's a thousand things can go wrong with this scheme yet. Suppose he can't get his crop picked and graded to suit the market? Suppose it don't get handled right on the road? Suppose the peaches don't turn out the kind that they'll pay for, up north? Suppose the market's flooded when his get there—they'll be shipping from Georgia two-three weeks before Dave can start to pick. It's one awful gamble he's taking, Jane."

Adam Gail spoke for the first time since Jane's

return. "It's a chance all the same, Shep. If old Dave can make peaches on this here sandhill land, the old road don't have to go to the scrap-heap after all. It'd be a pity to junk it, when they was any chance to keep it running. It's been a right pretty road, in its day, and it might be a sight better if we could make out to keep it going."

Jane saw an unexpected ally in this morose and taciturn cousin. She had known that he managed the railroad without guessing that he loved it. A glance passed between them, and she nodded as if to encourage him in his attitude.

"That's exactly my view, Cousin Adam," she said. "It would be a terrible pity to spoil a good, working railroad just when we've got to the turning point. I believe that we're going to see miles and miles of peach orchards along these ridges in the next few years, thousands of people at work, the year round, new life in the towns, and it all is bound to mean new traffic for the railroad—not just the seasonable traffic in the fruit we'll ship, but all the year through—bringing in supplies, carrying passengers. Let's not throw away the chance for a few pennies now."

"You certainly put a great deal of faith in the

idea, Mrs. Gail, but I'm afraid my firm won't look at it that way. We really want our money and we've got to get it, not in ten years but right away."

"Then I'm afraid you'll have to get it by foreclosing on our rolling stock, after all," she said evenly. "I shan't sell, anyway, and I'm quite sure that Mr. MacIvor won't even think of it."

"Look here, Jane—you don't see this right."

"I think I'm the only one who does see it right, Sheppard. Anyway, I won't sell. And if Mr. Caldwell really wants to get his money back, I should advise him to ride over and see those orchards, talk to Mr. MacIvor before he sets about foreclosing on the engines and cars. That won't take long—he could be back in Tyre by night, if he went at once. And it seems to me that it's only sound business judgment to make sure."

"That's certainly true." Caldwell got to his feet briskly. "I'll do it."

"I'll drive you over, sir." Adam Gail volunteered with something almost like eagerness. "I'd sort of like to see Dave's peaches for myself, and I got to talk to him about cars, anyhow."

Caldwell shook hands with Jane.

"I hope we don't have to fight each other on this deal, Mrs. Gail. If I don't find what you think I'll see, over there, I'm coming back to talk to you again."

"It won't make any difference," she told him, "but we'll be glad to see you, of course. I'm not going to sell my stock. That's settled."

Gail came back after seeing the two men away. There was a moment of uneasy silence between them. Jane saw that he was struggling with disappointment or perhaps with anger, forced to a visible effort to control himself. But he spoke casually enough to have deceived her if she had not seen the narrowing of his eyes and the tight lines about his mouth.

"I—I'm right sorry, you don't look at this thing straight. It'd mean quite a bit of money for you and me, if we sold out now—enough maybe to leave us get away from here and stay."

"But I don't want to get away, Sheppard. I like it here—and, anyway, the railroad's got to keep running, even if it does cost us something. If it stops—"

"It might just as well, Jane. There's no need of it, any more."

"With fifty carloads of peaches almost ready to ship?" She laughed. "What could Mr. MacIvor do with them, if the railroad wasn't running?"

"I reckon you know how I feel about that. I've told you a heap of times, Jane. It's a thousand to one that there's nothing in this peach notion of Dave's. It'd be a sight better for him in the end if we quit running the road right now, before he gets a chance to waste all that borrowed money on this new planting. Nothing else would stop him, but that would. He's got that much sense."

"I don't believe he'd stop, even for that," she said quickly. "I don't believe there's anything that would stop him. He isn't that sort."

Again she saw the suggestion of a tightening about his lips and eyes, but he kept his voice even and light.

"Maybe that's so. But I'm bound to think of somebody besides Dave MacIvor, in this thing, Jane. I got a heap of relations tied up in this road, and I hold a little stock myself. And there's you—I'm bound to look out for your interests all I can. If Dave's set on going bankrupt, that's his business. I can't help it. I've done all I can for him."

"I know you have. I—I think you've behaved

very well about that tax matter, Sheppard. You've been splendid ever since I came back."

The words seemed to lift him to his feet and carry him close to her. His eyes were glowing, and the strange singing quality had come back into his voice.

"That's all I care about, Jane—the way you feel towards me. I used to think I wanted a heap of things besides you, but I don't. Nothing matters, only you."

She drew away from him, frightened and repelled. She knew that if his hands touched hers she would struggle and cry out. For a moment they stood thus, the man's eyes searching hers, so that she seemed to fear what they might find and read there.

"I know, Sheppard. I'm sorry that I can't—I wish I could feel as I did, before that bad time, but I don't."

"I reckon I can wait, Jane." His voice was colder, now, and she felt an expanding relief, as from some pressing danger. She did not tell him what she had discovered in herself, just now—that she was past all chance ever of trusting and loving him again.

"I'll do what you want about the railroad," he said. "Maybe when Caldwell comes back, I can talk him into giving us some more time on the loans."

"I don't think you'll have to, Sheppard. If he sees those trees and talks to Mr. MacIvor, he'll be convinced."

He shrugged. "You got a heap of confidence in old Dave, Jane. It'll need a slick tongue to persuade that Yankee to ease up on us now."

"He'll do it," she declared. "You'll see."

He shook his head and went out toward the kennels. She tried, as she bathed and changed, to clear and order her thoughts. A kind of exhilaration pervaded her, a sense of conflict and danger against which an unreasoning confidence reassured her. She had never felt so keenly alive. It was like being happy, she thought, and yet there was a difference, too. She wasn't exactly that.

Toward nightfall Caldwell and Adam Gail came back from MacIvor's, and her first glance at the northerner's face told her that she had won her point.

"You were right, Mrs. Gail." He shook hands emphatically. "I've agreed to hold off till MacIvor's shipped his crop, anyway, and I've sort of prom-

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ised to back him beyond that, if this harvest shows up as he claims it's bound to. Probably I'll kick myself for it by the time I get home, but he got to me, that fellow. Hypnotized me, maybe."

"Dave's sure sold himself that peach notion." Sheppard Gail spoke casually, a hint of amusement in his tone. "I didn't think he'd make out to sell it to you, though, Mr. Caldwell. I hope it comes out all right."

"It probably won't," said Caldwell. "It looks too good to be true. I shouldn't have let that fellow put it over on me. I'll wake up pretty soon and find a hole in my pocket."

"You won't, Mr. Caldwell. He didn't put anything over on you—he told you the simple truth, as he always does. You'll see—he isn't just a dreaming fanatic—he's a—a—oh, a kind of prophet, out of the Old Testament—not that either, because he's young and human and alive—but he knows, he sees—"

"He's got more than one convert, anyway," Caldwell laughed. "I can see that you've got as much faith in him as he has in himself. He's lucky, I'd say."

"We're liable to miss that train, sir, if we don't

git started." Adam Gail consulted the railroad-man's super-accurate watch and replaced it carefully in a chamois case. Caldwell shook hands again and rode away. Jane, turning from the window, found her husband studying her. Something in his face alarmed and puzzled her. He spoke, after a long silence.

"Jane, that Yankee got the notion you're in love with Dave MacIvor. I could see him laughing inside, when he looked at me, after what you said. It sounded mighty like you—"

"Don't be absurd, Sheppard!" She laughed, but even to her own ear the sound of her mirth was flat and unconvincing. It was as if Gail's words had torn away some obscuring curtain in herself, and brought her face to face with an incredible, inevitable truth, to which she could never blind herself again.

A swiftly rushing stream of thought fled through her mind. Love—for that man, of all men—she had an instant of dull, helpless self-anger at the folly of it. Her thought leaped forward to the end of this insanity, and recoiled from the impossibility of romance. Even if she cared, it would not matter to David MacIvor. Always, to him, she would be Sheppard Gail's wife—a woman not only forever

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beyond his reach, but forever, by her own act, beneath his desire.

She glanced covertly at Sheppard Gail, a quick, oblique motion of half-veiled eyes, and felt a sharp stab of panic as she saw the intent look of him, the narrowed eyelids and the thin-lipped, tightened mouth. If he guessed—if he guessed—

“Please don’t say such things to me, Sheppard.”

“I’m sorry, Jane.” But his voice was absent, and his eyes did not change.. She went out to the gallery, resisting the thought that he knew how exactly his chance shot had found the target. The breath of the honeysuckle lay heavily sweet on the still air, an overpowering insistent odor that made her think of flowers in dark, closed rooms, of death.

She faced the realization, now, with a clearer vision that seemed almost impersonal as it appraised the measure of her folly. Surely no girl had ever tangled her life more needlessly and hopelessly than Jane Borden. No human skill or patience could ever bring order here. The thought brought up a memory of Miss Drummond’s word.

“No man could muddle things so perfectly unless he had grand help—it’s only God, tangling things

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up so it'll be worth His while to set all smooth again."

As she went in to supper the thought came to her that perhaps this tangle might be worth His while, a distant, doubting hope that Miss Ailie had the right of it, after all.

XVI

“**I**T looks like our luck had started in to turn, Jane.”

Sheppard Gail spread some worn and shabby bank-notes on the table-cloth and met Jane's questioning glance with a thin smile of satisfaction.

“Never figured I'd collect this here money,” he went on. “Been owing to me so long I'd plumb forgot I had it coming. Reckon we can afford for you to take a trip up to Raleigh for a spell—have a spree, Jane. Might even make it Richmond—see some shows and give you a chance at the stores. Reckon you must be wanting new clothes.”

For an instant the idea of the shops appealed shrewdly to the girl. A year ago she had regarded the great city stores, the cunningly tempting little specialty shops of the side streets, as a prime source of entertainment. It came to her, with a touch of wonder at herself, that she had hardly given a thought to the once vital matter of wardrobe in all the months she had spent here in the hills. It would be good to go back for a little; it

wouldn't be like shopping in New York, of course, but—

"We can't afford it, Sheppard. We ought to pay up the store with this money. I don't need smart clothes, down here."

"Store's paid already." He smiled again. "This is left over, and there's more where it come from, too. We can afford a vacation for you sure enough. I said it looks like luck had turned."

Again she was tempted and again she discovered that there was a conflicting desire to oppose old habit. She didn't want to go to Raleigh or even Richmond, at Sheppard Gail's expense. There was a difference, somehow, between suffering him to pay for the food she ate and the servants who prepared it, and allowing him to buy for her luxuries and pleasures which she could do without.

"Where did you get all that money, Sheppard?" She spoke without any keen interest, knowing that in a haphazard, reluctant fashion of his own he carried on a kind of business in cotton and tobacco brokerage, and occasionally earned a commission on the arrangement of a loan or the sale of some farm implement. She had discovered that he disliked the thought of these activities, that he was

ashamed of them and preferred to pose, in his own sight and hers, as a country gentleman, concerned only with his hounds and horses.

"Collected a back debt, like I said before," he told her. "And fixed up a new deal at the same time. We can afford it, all right. Better go, Jane. It'll be good for you to get a change. You look sort of peaked, and the hot weather's coming fast."

"I'm all right." She laughed. "And I don't want to go away now—they'll be starting to pick the early peaches in a day or two and I want to watch them do it. Perhaps, afterwards, when it's really hot, but not now."

He shrugged and pushed the bills across the cloth to her. "Just as you say, Jane. You might's well keep this money, anyhow. If I take it, I'm apt to spend it. I never could hang on to money very long."

She was on the point of refusing. She had never taken money from him; the few dollars that had been in her purse when Warren Borden died were still unspent. There was little need for money in the sandhills, and the sight of the shabby bills repelled her, as if taking them would imply too much. But she resisted the thought, and compromised by

showing him where she put the money, in the drawer of the old secretary which he had cleared for her use.

"I'll leave it here, so that you can find it if you need it," she said. "I really haven't any use for it. I've spent practically nothing all the time I've been down here."

He made no answer but she thought that his eyes narrowed a little, as if he guessed that she hated even the appearance of dependence on his generosity.

"You riding this morning?" He spoke in his usual, indifferent tone. She nodded. More and more her daily rides had come to occupy her time and thought. In the woods she could feel free, could forget everything except the sense of abundant power obedient to her will, of swift motion, the peace of long, lazy minutes when her mind was restfully blank, as if the spell of the forest had carried her back to the mental state in which remote ancestors had dwelt in just such rides and spinneys.

"Reckon I'll go along, if you don't mind. You'll be going over to see the peaches, I expect?"

"I might." She regretted his coming. The

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pleasure of the daily visit to the orchard was lessened in prospect by the thought of his unsympathetic presence.

"I reckon I better go along with you for a while, wherever you go," he continued, as if apologizing for an intrusion. "They tell me Rufe Breck's come back, and I'll feel a mite safer about you if you ain't running around the woods alone."

"Breck here?" She looked up, startled and displeased. "Isn't there a charge against him? Couldn't you have him arrested?"

He shrugged, grinning. "Got to catch him first," he said. "There's plenty of room for him around here, and he's got friends, too. Anybody with good liquor don't have to wait long for that. Harley's looking for him, of course, but I'd hate to bet on the chances of locking him up."

"I don't think he'd annoy me, anyway," she said. "I was frightened that time, of course, but I don't believe he meant anything. He was just frightened himself, I suppose. But Mr. MacIvor—do you think Breck will try to shoot him again—does he know that Breck's here?"

"Mighty little goes on around here that Dave don't know," said Gail, easily. "But I reckon he

don't have to worry much about Rufe Breck. Rufe was sore at him for licking him and took a shot at him, like most hill-billies would, but he ain't looking for more trouble now, or I miss my guess. Dave MacIvor is mighty tough meat for a fellow like Breck to chew, and Rufe's got some sense, anyhow. Reckon if Dave don't bother him he'll be plumb glad to leave Dave alone, too. I would."

The reasoning seemed sound enough to Jane, especially as she remembered how lightly MacIvor had taken Breck's enmity even after that shot from ambush. She told herself that she would make sure that MacIvor knew, when she saw him again, and the resolution set her anxiety at rest. They rode over the ridges in a glow of relentless sun that distilled keen, warm smells from the trees and weeds; even at a walk the horses sweated; Jane was conscious of relief when they stopped in the shade of a clump of young pines and saw MacIvor's imported laborers at work on the crates under the wide roof of the open pack-shed. The early fruit was, to Jane's untaught eye, already ripe for picking. The ground beneath the trees was littered with fallen peaches and Gail, slipping from the saddle, brought her a few of them, warm to the

touch and fragrant, but flavorless and watery when she tasted them.

"Not much good, are they?" He tossed the remnant away with a grimace. "I reckon nobody but a Yankee would take 'em as a gift."

"I suppose these aren't good ones," she suggested. "They certainly don't seem—"

"They're Mayflowers," he interrupted. "Only good thing about 'em is that they ripen early. Reckon these are as good as any you'll taste till the later ones come along."

She was vaguely disheartened. If this was a fair sample of the sort of fruit on which MacIvor counted for the future of his sandhills, Gail's doubts were justified, she thought. The northern markets, trained to demand perfection even in exotics, would never buy these sorry counterfeits of peaches. She thought of Caldwell, persuaded against his shrewd judgment to give MacIvor this one chance to prove his case. When that fruit reached the market, Caldwell would be quick to change his mind again, and if he did—

She was suddenly aware of the desolation of the wild land about her, the hot, still air, the starved and miserable growth of scrub woods and scattered

bunch-grass, already turning to a dull, burnt brown. And then, as she saw MacIvor's great, awkward horse crossing the cleared land toward the orchard, she seemed again to find her old faith in the land, in his dreams for it and of it. She saw him turn his head to look in her direction and lifted an arm in greeting. At the distance she could not be sure that he acknowledged the salute; she thought that his head inclined a little but he rode on, straight toward the packhouse, and she saw him dismount and tie his horse in its shade. Gail laughed softly.

"Old Dave's neck's mighty stiff, isn't it, Jane? That's his notion of how to bow to a lady. He don't even know it don't look polite. Dave might seem rude, if you didn't know him, but he ain't. According to his lights, he's as polite a man as I ever knew."

The defense irritated Jane's mood. It would not have cost David MacIvor much in time or effort to ride around by the blot of shadow where she waited. His avoidance seemed to shame her in Sheppard Gail's sight, so that Gail could see in it a slight upon her, and apologize for MacIvor with a profit to himself from the contrast.

"I suppose he's very busy," she said quietly.

"We'd better not interrupt him. We're only in the way. Let's go on."

He shrugged and sprang lightly back to his saddle. As they rode away she felt a change in his humor; his spirits had lifted visibly, and he was gay again, as he had been in the days of their first rides together. For herself, she was silent, harboring a persistent self-pity, touched very faintly with resentment. MacIvor disliked her, distrusted her, probably despised her as he despised her husband and his kind. He made it needlessly plain, not only to her, but to Sheppard Gail. It was as if he had been at deliberate pains to rebuff a friendly advance; she remembered that she had meant to put him on guard against Rufe Breck, and the thought aggravated her sense of injury.

"I reckon you're sort of mad at Dave, the way he acted just now." Gail turned in his saddle to face her. "You don't want to pay any attention to that, Jane. When you've known him as long as I have you'll see it's only his way."

The repetition annoyed her. "You needn't bother to defend him to me," she said quietly. "I think I know him very much better than you do or ever will, and I'm not likely to take offense at anything

he does or doesn't do. Nobody can have any doubt where he stands; it isn't necessary to guess at him through his manners."

"One for me, eh?" He chuckled. "I reckon I got more manners than I rightly need, the way it looks to you. But you're right about old Dave, all the same. It looks like you did know him mighty well."

The tone was jocular, almost in the flippancy of Gail's old manner, and his laugh as careless, light-hearted, but a shadow fell across Jane's mind as he rode on, a thin snatch of song floating back to her. The woods seemed to close in about her, stealthily, sinister. She was afraid of something which she could not name, and the gulf that separated her from the man whom she had married seemed to deepen and grow wider. She felt that she would never know him as she already knew MacIvor; always there would be that troubling doubt of the surface she could see, and of the man who wore it like a mask. For the second time since she had known him she was afraid of Sheppard Gail.

She tried to ridicule herself for the thought, as they rode on together, and he talked in his old key. Whatever he lacked, he was not a formidable

figure; he might inspire pity, dislike, ridicule, even love, perhaps, but never fear. He wasn't positive enough to be dangerous, certainly not to her, even if she read him wrongly as to others. Whatever else she might not know about her husband she would always be unshakably certain that he loved her. And she conceded him, impersonally and even with reluctance, a kind of admiration for the manner in which, without protestations and entreaties, he could make her so steadfastly sure of this.

She was not wholly proof against the softening influence of this conviction. The spectacle of his devotion lessened, by a little, her intuitive distrust of him, and MacIvor's rudeness had the effect of increasing her consciousness of this reaction in herself. Her normal common sense ridiculed her intuitions; she was deliberately complicating her problem, she told herself. Accident had done its best to simplify life for her; after all she was married to this man. The rational course was to put away the romantic folly which imagined sentiment in connection with that dour, stern farmer who had bowed to her as if it hurt him, to accept the more congenial existence which was hers for the taking.

But even so much effort to convince herself

seemed to defeat its own purpose. She discovered, as Gail's shoulder touched hers in a chance encounter of their horses, that something in her recoiled from the contact. His laughter sounded hollow, forced; she looked for hidden meanings in his drawling speech. And she thought, again, of David MacIvor, not angrily, but with wistfulness, the self-pity, she thought, of a child whose friendliness has been rebuffed.

By the time they reached the house she was deep in her conflicting meditations, glad of the chance to escape Gail's light chatter, and when, in the early afternoon, she saw him ride away on the Tyre road, she was aware of a sense of release, as if something like surveillance had been lifted and had left her free. In the cool of the dusk her restlessness returned; she ordered her mare and rode out along the road that led down to the station. She had almost reached the crest above the string of slatternly shanties when MacIvor's big white horse rose above the skyline and stopped, silhouetted against a low cloud. She knew MacIvor's trick of pausing whenever he reached the top of the ridge to give his horse a breathing space, but this evening the act seemed to acquire a special significance.

MacIvor must be driven, pressed by multiplying demands on his strength and time, but he could still spare his beast. She came toward him with a reviving glow of approval.

"I'm glad I happened to find you, David. I wanted to tell you this morning but you were so busy that I didn't dare interrupt."

He bowed stiffly, his mouth tight and his eyes hard. The look was like a surly answer, but she gave it no heed.

"Rufus Breck's come back," she went on. Her voice lowered a little. "I only heard it to-day, but I thought you ought to know."

He nodded. "I am obliged to you for the kindly thought, but it does not matter. I am too pressed just now to spare time for Rufus Breck. He can wait until I've finished with my peaches."

"That wasn't what I meant. He—he may try again to kill you, David. He wouldn't be likely to forget—"

MacIvor laughed harshly. "You are in the right, there, but he has not forgotten that I can break him in my hands if the need comes. He will not trouble me until I give him fresh cause to be afraid. By his code the account is balanced as things stand."

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"I don't think so, David. I think he hates you enough to do anything he can—I'm afraid he'll—"

"You need not be disturbed on my account, Mrs. Gail. It will need more than Rufus Breck to stop me now. But I am grateful for your good intent in warning me."

His horse seemed to understand the inflection of his voice as ending the talk. The great beast moved forward, and Jane, resisting an angry impulse to ride on, turned too, and held her place at the man's side. He did not seem aware of her presence; he kept his face straight to the front, and she could see the flexed muscles about his jaws. The thought came to her that this man really hated her, as he hated her husband, that her presence cost him now a sore strain on the self-repression which was his notion of good manners.

"Perhaps you'd rather I rode back alone, David." The speech escaped her against her will. She was ashamed of the tone and word the moment they reached her ear.

"Since you ask it, I will tell you plainly that I would," he said, still without looking at her. "You will find it strange, perhaps, that I should not wish to ride with my neighbor's wife. I have heard

that such things are ordered differently in your country. Here we are simple folk, and have little wisdom beyond the knowledge that it is well to avoid the appearance of evil."

The words stung her like the lash of a whip. She twisted her mare about and touched the beast's flank with a blunt spur. When she drew rein and glanced back, the man and his horse had vanished beyond a bend. She waited, in a glow of angry shame, until she was sure that MacIvor would have reached the fork in the roads, where his own path branched away from hers. Then, keeping the impatient mare to a walk, she followed. By the time she reached home, she had her anger under control. She told herself, as she changed, that she had learned her lesson at last.

And she was so responsive, at the candle-lighted table, to Sheppard Gail's talk, that she saw his eyes lighten and felt a change in the timbre of his voice.

"Jane, you sound like you might get over hating me some time. I—"

Again she felt the appeal of him. A kind of angry self-contempt rose in her; here, after all, was romance. This man loved her with something better than mere intellect. Under a hard test he

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had proved himself; she was a fool to let an absurd illusion of sentiment stand between them, to imagine that she cared for—

He seemed to read her glance. He moved toward her, his eyes shining, his hands lifted a little, eager and yet pleading. She almost cried out at the reality of the picture that seemed to lift before her; it was as if David MacIvor, straight and still on his old white horse, had ridden between them and was watching her with those hard, unwavering eyes that made her think of lake ice.

“No!” she cried. “Don’t, Sheppard!”

He stopped and his hands dropped gently to his sides, his whole body relaxing and drooping to his wonted ease of carriage. His face changed, too, the familiar, half-mocking grin replacing that rapt look that had transfigured him.

As she met his eyes they seemed to mask his thoughts again, after that instant of revelation. And a thrill of fear went through her at the crazy thought that he, too, had seen that intervening vision of MacIvor.

XVII

AGAINST her will the thought of the harvest drew Jane Gail again to MacIvor's orchards, and the fascination of the scene held her there in the face of a new fear of meeting the man himself. She felt as if she watched the climatic moment of some inexorable melodrama, as if, under her eyes, the patient toil of years swept up to a sudden, crashing culmination. The feeling seemed to her thought to affect even the groups of negroes among the trees; they sang and called to one another as they worked, but they moved with a strange, new swiftness, a touch of something like excitement in their voices. The imported packers, in the shadows of the wide, flat-roofed sheds, dealt with the converging streams of fruit as if by some trick of magic; their fingers seemed uncannily intelligent and alert as they graded and packed. There was a thrill even in the sight of the loaded carts, creaking away through the loose sand to the railroad, and now and then Jane followed these, to look on while a car was filled and iced.

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Here, for the first time, she seemed to confront the phenomenon of prosperity in process, to see the beginnings of that future which MacIvor had foretold. The little village was still indolent and passive except for the sweating, shouting roustabouts who loaded the car. There were still idlers napping in the shadow of the station wall, lean, languid hounds drowsing under the platform, sunburned, slit-eyed white men lounging and drawling and spitting in the background, but Jane Gail felt a new quality in the familiar scene. Beyond this drowsiness of reluctant waking she could foresee a time when these sidings would load long trains, when, instead of a trickle of fruit in one direction and of money in the other, there would be broad streams of both, when even the apathetic, squinting onlookers at the store would have responded to some infection of envy and emulation.

She had been afraid, at first, of chance encounters with MacIvor, but she found it easy to avoid him, and guessed that he was well pleased to let her presence go unnoticed when he could. Her anger toward him had cooled; she could make excuses for him, could tell herself that what had seemed a willful affront was no more than this man's manner, could

even admire the forthrightness with which he had spoken. There was a kind of courage in that utter frankness, a courage of which most men would have been incapable; she came to understand that much of what passed for courtesy among people who called themselves polite was no more than a canny willingness to avoid trouble, a sort of blend of indolence and cowardice. But she was careful, nevertheless, to keep out of MacIvor's way.

She had no speech with him while the early fruit was harvested. There was a brief interval before the later varieties ripened, and she stayed away from the orchard for a day or two, riding alone, or with her husband, in other directions. Gail's manner was again what it had been when she had first come back to him, carefully careless, she told herself, gay with a sort of resolution. He said nothing of MacIvor on these rides, and she fancied that his silence was significant, although she could not guess its meaning. There were even moments when she thought that her queer fancy had been sound; that Gail, too, had seen what came between them that evening when his hands had all but closed on hers.

But she was only vaguely disturbed by this reflection. Even the thought of Rufus Breck, skulk-

ing in the pines again, seemed to have lost the power to frighten her. MacIvor, she felt, was in no danger at his hands. There were times when she was almost happy.

She had ridden out alone in the early evening, taking, by the mare's whim, the lane that led down to the station road. The sun had already dipped beyond the straggling pines of the rim; a friendly, gentle coolness settled slowly like a shadow: she could feel a response in herself to the kindness of the hour, to the light breeze that was like a loving touch on her cheeks. As she neared the fork of the roads, she heard a slow, marching song, and drew rein to listen.

The air was remotely familiar; she could not distinguish words, but she knew that she had heard the song, somewhere, long ago, and her mind fumbled for the association. It had something to do with old Meggie, and the nursery in the lonesome house before she had gone to live with Warren Borden. Suddenly she laughed.

"Scots wha hae wi' Wallace bled!"

Even old Meggie had looked and sounded militant as she chanted it, Jane remembered. She let the mare move forward and reached the forks just

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as David MacIvor finished the verse. She had heard him sing, sometimes, at the little church, but never in a voice that she could have recognized as this. He stopped as he saw her, and she could have laughed at the sheepishness of his look, as if she had come upon him in some childish act.

"You'll think I'm daft," he said. "But I was in the mood, and I thought there was none near enough to hear."

The tone warmed her. For once he seemed to have forgotten that she was his enemy. The voice took her into his confidence.

"You've had good news of your crop, then?" She guessed instantly what had exhilarated him to the pitch of that anthem. He nodded.

"Two-eighty a crate, for Mayflowers! The thing's scarce to be believed!"

"I knew you'd win, David!" Under the excitement of the news she forgot everything except her share in triumph. She laid her hand lightly on his bridle wrist. And the touch seemed to waken him with a start. He straightened, stiffened and moved his arm so that her hand dropped.

"I'm obliged to you, Mrs. Gail."

The voice hurt her.

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"Oh, David, why have you got to hate me so?"

"You can see the necessity, at all events." His tone did not lighten. "If I could hate you as I ought—"

She caught at the phrase. "You mean that you don't—that you're only trying?"

"Oh, why must you have me say it? Is it not enough that this sin should have me by the throat—that my eye offends and that I cannot pluck it out? Must I even sin in word as I sin in thought?"

She heard herself laughing softly, saw her hands clinging to his rigid arm.

"Sin, David? Must you think of it as sin?"

"What is it less?" The words seemed to be torn from him. "Can I covet my neighbor's wife and do no wrong? Sin and folly—and you must minister to your vanity by hearing it in speech! Can you not be content with what you have done to me, made of me, without the telling of it?"

Slowly the words carried understanding to Jane Gail. She saw herself as this man saw her, saw how he must regard the thought of love between them.

"You do hate me, then. You think it must be folly as well as sin to—to want me!"

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"What else?" He spoke savagely. "What have I to do with you? If you were as free as I, what would it be but folly? You play with men's love and men's lives, like a child with toys! You pluck a man's love for a nosegay and wear it for a day! Do you think me so blind that this is hidden from me, fool as I am? First it is Gail and then me, and then, on impulse and whim, you marry him, and again, on a whim you come back to me, only, on another whim, to go again to him! And now, living with him, you must still tempt me with pretty words and little tricks of touch!"

He twisted his arm from her hands.

"You see? I have no scales upon my eyes! I know you for what you are! And yet, in wickedness and folly, I—"

"You care!" She marveled at herself that there should be no anger in her, but only a great glow of pride and joy, a sense of power such as she had never known. "You care, David! And I never dreamed—I never hoped—"

"I will not say the word!" He set his teeth. "You shall not carry me so far, do what you will. I will not say it!"

"It doesn't matter, since I know." She could

even laugh softly again. "You must call it wicked, if you see it so, but you shall not think of it as folly, for it isn't that, David! It isn't! I thought I cared for Sheppard, but I never did! I knew that truth the moment I saw him for what he was—and I came back because there was no other sanctuary. And then—"

"And then, when he had beaten me, you went over to his side! You did but your duty, to be sure, but not because it was your duty, but your pleasure. Duty has no meaning for such as you! It is a word—"

"I went back to him because it was the price of your timber and the dreams you clung to still," she cut in evenly. "If I had not gone he would have built the courthouse and the roads and ruined you! I found out the mischief I had done you, without knowing what I did! If I had never come back to Miss Ailie's house, you would have carried that election! They voted against you, those Scotch farmers, because of me! And I did not know until it was too late! And he might have killed you and gone free if I had stayed. I saw that, too. And I went back to him—on my own terms, David. If it was duty, then duty and pleasure were one,

for once, for I was glad to pay you back a little of my debt."

He sat very still. "I must be asking pardon for my thoughts, then. You are no wanton woman. But here is an ill matter made far worse. There have been whiles when I could almost despise you, thinking what I thought. But now—" he shook his head slowly—"now I can never think that again, and it will be hard."

"You want to—to think evil of me?"

"It would be better to think evil of Sheppard Gail's wife than to—"

"I'm not his wife, David. I live in his house as I lived in yours! You must know that and believe it. I could not have gone back, else. I save his pride by living there, and he is a proud man, whatever else he may be."

"It does not matter." He spoke grimly, but she felt, in the tone, a throb of triumph that was all unlike the man she knew. "You are joined to him in the sight of God and men—"

"I knew that you would see it so," she interrupted. "Of course I don't. Even my church would dissolve this marriage, and the law—"

"We have learned to play fast and loose with

our statutes, but we do not escape from God's. You are Gail's wife, and in your heart you know it."

"I don't! I've never known it! I can't believe that God, even your God, who will forgive a willful sin, will not forgive a mistake in which there was no sin, but only ignorance and impulse. I did no wrong when I married Sheppard Gail, and you would have me punished as I would not be punished for a crime! There is no sense or justice or truth in such a doctrine, David!"

He shook his head. "It is a good argument, but no more than that. You know that between you and me there is no room for even friendship!"

"I don't know it," she cried. "I won't know it! I won't believe that love is wrong! I won't believe that God's so pitiless—"

"And He is not! There you speak truth at last. But here is a tangled weaving that no hand but His can order. No man's, at least! 'Let not man put asunder!' That much is very clear."

She felt the inexorable finality of his voice, knew that no word of hers would move that unshakable conviction, and a kind of peace came to her, an acquiescence that was almost consent. She could even be glad that he stood firm and fast on his

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beliefs, a man like a rock, among men who drifted like tumbleweeds before the winds of light desire or small advantage. There was pride in her, a pride that laughed at the petty rebukes of thin convention; she was even proud that she had spoken; proud of her surrender, prouder than all else of the knowledge that in the teeth of his will and his beliefs this man loved her.

"It doesn't matter." She heard her voice as if some one else had spoken, and wondered at herself for the conviction that the words carried. The law that must stand between them always became a trivial, minor thing, like time and distance, that might intervene but could not separate.

"Does it not?" He laughed, a short, harsh sound. "There might be two words to that. But it holds fast. And it will hold."

Afterwards, remembering that it was his horse that moved forward, she could even smile at the dogged consistency of him. He left her, at the fork of the roads, without a word of farewell or a single backward glance. She watched him till the shadows closed in about him and then, marveling at herself, rode home to supper, with Sheppard Gail's eyes watching her in the candlelight, un-

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wontedly alert and intent. He was so silent during the meal that she wondered uneasily if he could feel, by some trick of telepathy, the rush and confusion of her thoughts.

She was glad that some unexplained errand took him away soon afterward and left her alone with memories and dreams.

XVIII

ADAM GAIL, dusty from his ride up from the railroad, found Jane at her late breakfast with Sheppard Gail, and told his news in a tone even more morose than his dismal habit.

"I guess it's all over with the railroad, now, Shep. If we don't get to carry them peaches for Dave MacIvor we'll get junked, sure. And I was countin' on two cars from him, to-day. You got to do somethin', this time, if you aim to keep the road runnin'—I'm plumb sick of this here moon-shinin', bootleggin' funny-business, Shep."

"So's everybody, I guess," Sheppard Gail cut in evenly. "But I don't see why it's worrying you so that you've got to spoil my breakfast, Ad. What's wrong now? Some of your hands drunk?"

"I wish 't they was was! I'd drown 'em in the water-tank! It ain't as easy as that, Shep. Somebody taken an' spread liquor all round, yest'd'y evenin'—ain't hardly a sober nigra in the township. All them pickers 't works for Dave MacIvor is sleepin' it off, an' them packers he fetched up from Georgia

got fightin'—two of 'em is right wore down, they tell me. Reckon it means two-three cars 't won't get shipped. And if it keeps up—"

Jane's glance moved quickly to her husband's face. She half expected to surprise a look of satisfaction there, and it pleased her, against her will, to find him grimly angry.

"So that's it, eh? Rufe Breck's getting square with Dave MacIvor by feeding liquor to his labor, right in picking time! I might have figured he'd do that! You're plumb right, Ad, it's got to stop sudden, right where it is! You ride on over to Tyre and tell Harley to fetch a couple of deputies back with him. We'll go get Rufe to-day, or know why. Still-running's one thing and blockading to nigras is something right different. You tell Harley I mean business, Ad."

Adam Gail's gloom seemed to lighten a little but he did not move.

"You mean it, Shep? You ain't funnin' with me?"

"Do I sound like I'm funning, Ad? You get on over to Tyre and tell Harley what I said. This is where Rufe Breck gets off for keeps. Reckon we been too easy on him, but that's finished. You go get Harley. I'll tend to the rest of it."

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His cousin's frown smoothed to something that was almost a grin. "You sure sound like business, Shep. I'll get going."

He turned. Jane could hear him running heavily across the gallery, and the thump of galloping hoofs announced his departure at top speed. Jane turned to face her husband.

"What made him talk like that, Sheppard? He sounded as if it rested with you to say whether this thing stopped or went on."

He spread his hands. "Reckon that's what he meant, Jane. It does, in a way. You know that. Harley, he sort of takes his orders from me. I never made a secret out of that, did I? Up north I reckon they'd say I was a boss. It's a bad system, but it's the only one 't seems to work. And it don't work out so bad down here. County gets pretty good government, all around."

"Then you mean that you—you've winked at this illicit traffic in moonshine—till now?"

"Maybe. We can't hire enough deputies to keep these woods clear of stills, Jane. Eat the county up in taxes. We do what we can, and let the rest slide. Moonshining don't look wrong to most folks around here, and you can't enforce a law without

the people want it enforced, no matter where you live. But we can control the business, more or less, and we'll control it this time. You'll see."

He went out abruptly. She heard him calling an order to a stable hand, and followed him to the gallery.

"Have him saddle Silverheels, too," she said. "I'm going with you, Sheppard."

He glanced at her doubtfully for a moment. Then he shrugged.

"Reckon you'll go, no matter what I say. All right." He called again to the negro and went back into the house for his boots. By the time the horses were ready Jane was with him on the gallery. They cantered down the lane together.

"We'll go see if we can find Dave, first," he told her. "He's bound to be out hunting for Breck, but maybe we can locate him. And I got to try and make him believe the county'll handle this job for him. Dave's bound to get himself shot up if he goes after Breck alone, and we can't afford to lose him, right now."

"You think he'll doubt you?"

"I know he will." He laughed. "Dave knows

we ain't been any too hard on folks like Rufe Breck. But I want you should help me, this time, Jane. He might believe you. I'd hate to let him get shot up over this thing."

Doubt persisted in her in the face of his seeming sincerity. She tried to tell herself that she was wrong, that her fear on MacIvor's account made her see danger to him in everything, but she felt that Gail's solicitude was unreal, that he was, for some reason of his own, playing a part. She tried not to think of the thing he suggested, but she kept finding in her mind a memory of the scene she had almost forgotten, of MacIvor sprawling in the reddened sand, after that first encounter with Rufus Breck. The thought made her less attentive to Gail's inflection and manner. The danger to David MacIvor was what mattered, and Sheppard Gail had nothing to do with that.

He rode a little ahead of her as the road narrowed so that there was not room for two abreast, and there was no more talk until he drew rein suddenly, with a loud hail. She checked her mare beside him and caught a deep breath of relief at the sight of MacIvor, riding toward them.

"Dave, we just got word of this business, and I

rode over to tell you that the county'll handle it for you, this time. Ad Gail's on his way to Tyre right now to fetch Harley and some deputies. You can leave it to us and go back to your peach crop. We can't risk getting you shot up—not now, anyhow.”

He chuckled on the last words. MacIvor's glance, after one swift, expressionless swerve to meet Jane's eyes, did not change or waver; he sat erect and still, his face set and stern. Jane saw the butts of two heavy pistols protruding from the holsters on each side of his saddle.

“I don't expect you'll believe me, Dave, after the way we been leaving Breck alone, but I'm talking straight, ail the same. I ain't pretending I like you, but I'm saying that I can't afford to get you shot. You know why, all right. I can't afford to have Breck keep you from shipping your peaches, either. If the road goes bust—”

“You offer to find Breck and his still for me, Gail?”

MacIvor spoke evenly, without expression.

“That's right. And I'm owning up that it'll be a sight safer for me and Harley than it 'd be for you. Breck ain't out to fight the sheriff, but he's

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gunning for you, anyhow. You better turn around, Dave, and go back to your pack-sheds."

"You seem confident, Gail. What makes you think that you can find Breck and his still?"

Jane felt the challenging implication of the tone and glanced at Gail with a stab of apprehension. There was a sense of enmity in the very air, and the good humor of her husband's tone and look failed to reassure her against it. She was afraid of something, with no clear understanding of what it was; she could hear her pulses, and knew that she was breathing unsteadily and fast.

"We can find it as quick as you, I reckon, Dave. You been hunting for it a right good while, anyhow." Gail laughed. "And Harley and I'd be apt to have better luck; we know more about bootleg whisky than you do."

"There is a word I do not doubt, at last," said MacIvor. "I know little of that trade, but a little is too much. I will find Breck to-day, myself."

"You're mighty sure of it, ain't you?" Gail shook his head. "Look here, Dave—there's no sense in your getting a bullet in your back over this thing. Leave me and Harley handle it. Harley's

paid to do it, and sworn to do it, too. It's no business for you."

"I make it my business, then. I shall lose two carloads of good fruit over last night's work, but I count it a small price to pay. For I shall find Breck's still, Gail, to-day."

"You got a notion where it is, then?"

"No, but I know I am to find it. That seems no more than a boast to you, Gail, but it is true. I know that I shall find—"

Gail laughed softly. "I reckon I get you now, Dave. You figure you're going to get led somehow. You think somebody's going to take hold of your bridle and bring you spang to the right place?"

"Just that, Gail. And it seems folly to you?"

"No, it don't." Gail sobered abruptly. "We got different words for the same notions, that's all. I got what I call a hunch that my luck 'd take me where Breck's at. You got the same feeling, only you say that something else—Providence maybe—is going to take hold of your bridle and lead you straight."

"And if I have that belief, Gail, shall I turn back, and put my faith rather in you, and the blind god you know as luck? Would you, in your turn,

having at stake as much as I have, be content to leave the issue to me and what I call Providence?"

Gail laughed happily. "You're right, Dave. I wouldn't. Reckon you got to go through with it, feeling thataway. But it's right funny, all the same—you and your Providence headed the same way as me and my luck? Makes me think of the place in the Bible where some old prophet got a fire going in wet wood, after the heathen priests fell down on the job. Which way you aim to look, Dave?"

"I had thought of riding again along the swamp. But—"

"But you been over it plenty of times before now. No use wasting good time on it again. If either of us two is right, Dave, we don't need to worry it out by thinking. You don't believe in luck like I do. Used to find my lost marbles, when I was a kid, by chucking another one up in the air and looking close where it come down. Know how I aimed to hunt for Breck's still, Dave? I was going to drop the reins on my horse's neck and leave him go where he was a-mind to—like this!"

He knotted the straps loosely so as to shorten them and let them fall on the clipped mane of his mount. Jane, staring blankly, wondered why she

did not laugh. She had encountered, more than once, this curious belief in his luck that was Gail's only religion, but never had it impressed her as anything more than the surviving, shallow superstitions with which she was familiar—the habit which made intelligent men touch wood after a rash statement, or quarrel over the grain of the card-table. Now, she saw, he was in deadly earnest—as earnest as MacIvor could have been. And, glancing at MacIvor she saw that the nonsense was as serious to him as to Gail. His eyes did not move from Gail's; there was no relaxation of the hard lines about his mouth.

“You have faith in your luck, Gail. And that is better than no faith at all.” Slowly he gathered the loose reins and knotted them as Gail had done. “Your plan is good. I will follow it.”

Gail nodded. “I reckoned you would, Dave.” He twisted in his saddle to glance at Jane. “Must look plumb crazy to you, Jane—both of us.”

She shook her head. In the still shadow of the pines it was easy to slip back into the mental state of the people who had seen mystery in just such silent spaces as these. She tried to reassure herself by reason; it was all pure folly—chance and God

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subdued to man's desire and purpose! And yet—she lifted a hand to her throat as MacIvor's horse started deliberately forward, as if in obedience to a command. It was natural enough—her own mare would not have stood half so long without the restraint of the bit—and yet she found it now significant and terrifying. Gail's horse followed, a pace or two behind, and, still keeping a tight rein, Jane let the mare go on after them.

They rode in silence, in this wise, for perhaps two furlongs. Here the track forked, one branch leading back to the Gail house, the other swerving off through the scrub and keeping to the ridge that overlooked the brake of reeds and marsh plants along the swampy branch. Here both MacIvor's horse and Gail's turned to the left, without pause. Jane felt a thrill of something like fear. Gail's horse, on the right of MacIvor's, would have taken, by habit, the right hand road over which they had just come, the road that led him back to his stall, but, from behind, Jane saw him turn to the left sharply, as if a hand had jerked unkindly at the bit. And yet Gail's hands rested easily on his thighs, and the knotted lines were halfway to his horse's ears.

She kept a few paces to the rear, mechanically restraining the mare's impatience while she tried to persuade herself that she was silly to see even a momentary meaning in the accident, that it was nothing but superstition that made her doubt the outcome of this fool's errand. She knew that it was nonsense, and yet, as she repeated the word in her thought, she discovered an obstinate conviction that would hear no reason. Something had made those horses turn from a familiar, traveled road to this vague cart track along the ridge; something led them, now, past successive forks where the casual wanderings of wood-carts had left rutted trails between the scrub oaks and young pines; something—

The trail dipped almost to the swamp and climbed again; it turned aside to cut off a wide bend in the branch, and emerged a quarter-mile farther down the stream, to bring her suddenly into a remembered setting. Below, where the stream narrowed between firmer banks, she recognized the ford where she had knelt to drink, that day when chance had shown her Rufus Breck's liquor jugs hidden under the inkberry bushes. She caught her breath at what seemed a confirming coincidence; it was down there,

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beside that bit of shining water, that she had watched MacIvor fight with Breck at the beginning of the quarrel that had led to this pursuit. Of course it was only chance—there was no possible connection between that affair and the course that the horses had chosen, and yet—and yet—

She stopped the mare with an instinctive pull at the reins, watching the two horses before her lower their bodies down the slant toward the ford. And again she had a thrill of fear as they turned sharply to the right, into the faintly outlined track that led back over the ridge to the closed hunting lodge where she had come with Warren Borden—how many years ago? It wasn't possible that she was the same girl who had ridden down that lane—that less than a year had passed since she had faced Rufus Breck beside that ford! She had a sense of unreality, as if, knowing better the while, she allowed a vivid dream to convince and frighten her.

MacIvor and Gail rode side by side along the track; there was almost no sign of passage here, and, following them, Jane told herself that a year ago she would not have known it for a trail. But the horses plodded on as if wholly sure of their course; sometimes, she saw, Gail's pressed a little

to the front, and again MacIvor would be a pace or two in the lead, but there was never much distance between them.

She saw that unless they turned aside again they would presently come to the hunting lodge, and the thought wakened memories of Warren Borden, of the girl who had come with him into the sandhills—a girl who seemed remote and strange to the Jane Gail who came back, now, to the scenes that she had avoided, without realizing it, ever since Miss Drummond had taken her away from them. That girl had laughed at David MacIvor; had almost hated him; had liked Sheppard Gail and believed him. Jane felt a quick impatience for her folly, as if it had not been her own.

She saw the horses turn again and leave the trail for another, still less visible. It seemed at first that there was no track here and her unbelief quickened; she was scornfully amused at the superstition which the men seemed to share. Neither God nor luck could be hired as a guide, she told herself. The whole affair was silly, stupid; the horses were wandering at random, no more.

For perhaps a quarter of a mile they rode between the young pines, veering away from the buildings

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in the clearing. She was glad of this. The thought of the lodge still repelled her; she did not want to see it, to revive her dulling memories of the last few hours there. She saw the men draw rein and came up with them. The horses stood in a gap between dogwood thickets, and beyond them, a few yards away, she could see a square, solid structure of logs and clay, its roof in sagging disrepair but the walls still stout and plumb.

It startled her. She had not known that there was any building here, within this easy distance of the lodge; she guessed that it belonged to the camp; something in the construction seemed to suggest that it had been built at the same time and by the same men who had erected the lodge itself.

"Raeford's kennels," said Gail, softly. "I'd plumb forgot they were still standing. Hated to have his hounds close to the house, Raeford did. Wonder what made the horses come this way—looks like we wasted our time, Dave."

MacIvor lowered himself deliberately to the ground and took his pistols from their holsters. Jane saw that his face was strangely hard, even for him.

"You should know the smell of mash, Gail," he

said quietly. "We have wasted no time. The still is yonder. Rufus Breck is shrewder than I thought him."

Jane caught the sour smell of fermenting grain, and held her breath as she glanced again at the building. Above the crude chimney she saw the air bend and tremble, though there was no smoke.

"Be careful, David! He must be there now! He'll shoot!"

MacIvor seemed not to hear. He strode straight to the slab door and flung it open with the barrel of a pistol. She saw him go in, and waited, in the clutch of fear, for the sound of shots. But instead there was only a crash of metal on metal, and as she urged Silverheels closer she could see, through the open doorway, that MacIvor had found an ax and was using it on the copper coils of the worm. Beside her she heard Sheppard Gail's quiet laugh.

"Too bad we both found it," he said. "Didn't prove a thing. Maybe it was luck and maybe not. Won't ever know."

He slid out of the saddle and went to the door, leaning against the frame and watching MacIvor's methodical destruction of still and worm and vat. He chuckled again.

"Reg'lar fox, Rufe Breck. No wonder Dave couldn't ever spot him by the smoke. Been burning charcoal!"

MacIvor emerged, the ax in his hands, his face expressionless.

"He is no fool, as you say. I should have found this long ago. He must have moved it when the lodge was occupied."

"Luck was sure with us, this morning, for a fact," laughed Gail. "Reckon you ought to say thanks, Dave. It was my notion."

MacIvor regarded him steadily. "I have not forgotten, Gail." His tone changed. "The man himself is not far off. There was fresh fuel on his fire."

Jane started. "Let's not stay here, then. He'll try to shoot you."

MacIvor glanced at her. "You should not have come with us, Mrs. Gail. You are right. We will go. There is a risk."

Gail sprang back to his saddle with a single, graceful motion. MacIvor lifted his weight slowly, and they rode away as they had come. At the trail to the camp, Gail paused.

"Did you think to look for liquor, Dave? Strikes

me that Rufe would be apt to have some hid up. His stuff was always aged a mite before he'd sell it."

MacIvor shook his head. "There was no sign of it, in the cabin. But it is likely, as you say, that he has hidden a store of it somewhere. I will find it later. There is no need to search now, and Mrs. Gail is with us."

"That's right. Reckon we better get her safe before we go looking for more trouble." Gail nodded. "We can cut across past the camp and get home quicker than if we ride around the way we come."

He turned his horse toward the lodge and MacIvor followed. Jane repressed an impulse to object. After all, it was silly to feel this way about the camp. She said nothing during the few minutes that passed before they came out in the clearing. The sight of the closed lodge, its windows sealed with board shutters, hurt her. She turned her glance from it quickly. MacIvor checked his horse.

"The weeds are trodden," he said, pointing. "See—here is a path to the very door."

He slipped to the ground and led his horse toward

the porch. Gail hesitated. Jane saw him glance from MacIvor to her, and again to MacIvor, as if in doubt.

"Shucks, Dave—that don't mean anything. Nigras likely—seeing if there's a way inside."

MacIvor spoke without turning. "No negro would come here, Gail. They think the place haunted, as you know. It would be a safe hiding place for aging liquor, and Breck has proved himself no fool." He bent over the clumsy padlock that closed the outer door of rough pine boards.

"See!" He twitched at the chain and it came free in his hands, the staple dangling at one end like a drawn tooth. He pulled back the door and tried the inner one. It was not locked. He went inside. Jane sprang down from her saddle, drawn suddenly by a sense of panic. She was afraid to be out here, with MacIvor in the house. She half ran after him, Gail following.

The hall was in a half light from the open door, but the rooms beyond were dark. Jane could hear MacIvor walking in the kitchen wing, and moved after him. She found him fumbling in the store-room off the kitchen.

"I was right. He has been storing his liquor here. There are jugs and a barrel."

"Better open a shutter, Dave. Can't see a thing in here." Gail spoke from behind Jane. She felt a strange constraint in his voice. MacIvor straightened. In the faint light from a gap in the shutter Jane could see his face dimly, and she felt her nerves draw tight as he turned to Gail.

"Gail, I was waiting for that word. It was well thought of—as well thought of as the rest of your morning's work. I was not sure, till now, what was in your heart."

"I don't get you, Dave. All I was after was to help you locate Breck's still."

"And you found it, fast enough, when it marched with your pleasure to lead me there."

"Oh, I see now. You want to make out I knew where it was at, all the time! Reckon some folks would think so, but I didn't look for you to do it, Dave. I know it was just luck that carried us to the kennels, but I had a notion you'd figure it was God." He laughed thinly. "Looks like you ain't got as much faith as old Elijah, Dave."

"Gail, you have shrewd wits, but you take all men, except yourself, for fools. Did you think I

could not see you touch my horse with your boot, when we sat waiting to try yonder plan of yours? Did you think my eyes so blind that I could not mark how you guided your own beast, at each turn, with the trick of the knee? Could I not see you choose the path, at every fork?"

Gail laughed again. "Seeing things, Dave! What for would I go making a fool out of myself? If I knew where Rufe had hid up his still, I could have gone straight there, couldn't I?"

"I wonder, Gail, if you could go straight to any goal. But I do not wonder that you chose the crooked path to this one. Luck, you say? I wonder how well you hold your faith in that luck of yours, Gail? Well enough to stand here, beside me, when I throw yonder shutter back? It was well planned, Gail—to let me find Breck's still and stand by to see him kill me, as you made sure he would. It was well thought of, when he did not shoot at once, to bring me here, so that he might have other chances. And it was clever to propose, just now, that I open the shutter. Did you see Breck in the wood, Gail? Or do you but hope that he waits out yonder, with his finger ready on the trigger?"

Again Gail laughed, but this time the sound was

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forced and strange and there was no mirth in it.

"You're dreaming, Dave, or crazy. Rufe Breck wouldn't shoot—"

"Gail, for your own purposes you proposed a trial between gods, this day, between your master and mine, believing in neither of the two, your tongue in your cheek as at a jest. You will find either of those two ill to challenge, Gail. See, stand here, as I stand, and see—"

Before Jane could cry out he had leaned forward and flung open the wide, single leaf of the shutter. A broad beam of sunlight flooded in on the two men and so closely on its coming that it seemed to Jane to be a consequence and part of that illumination, a flat, spiteful, echoing noise sounded in the clearing. She saw Gail sway backward, his hands outspread and groping. Then, as MacIvor reached toward him, he sank to his knees.

"Mighty poor shooting for Rufe Breck," she heard him say. "Missed you, Dave—missed you clean!"

He slipped from MacIvor's hold and lay still, grotesque, incredible, on the rough floor. Jane heard remote noises, shouts, the beat of hoofs, a clatter of

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shots, all at some infinite distance. She tried, as if in some benumbed dream, to lean down and touch the huddled figure at her feet, and could not. MacIvor knelt and fumbled for a pulse. Steps echoed in the outer rooms, a loud hail, and Harley Gail came in, breathless.

"We got Breck—claims he done killed—" his voice stopped short as he stared at the group. Jane was vaguely aware of a compassion as she saw the honest sorrow in his brick-colored face. She seemed to stand outside of it all, to have no part in it.

MacIvor touched her arm and the contact startled her to a sudden clearness of understanding. She yielded to the guiding pressure and went before him to the sunlit cleanness of the gallery.

"I must wait here," he said quietly. "There will be much to do. It would be best if you rode—" his lips had framed the simple, meaning word, but he held it back—"to my aunt's house." He hesitated. "I take shame that you were there, but it is better that you know what passed, even at the price of fear."

"I wasn't frightened, David. Perhaps there wasn't time—no, I had time to think, to understand that it could only end this way. I knew that nothing

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could happen to you, that you have too much to—to do, to—”

“To live for!” He finished for her, soberly and yet with a singing in his voice.

The sound of it rode with her through the high pines of MacIvor's Folly wood.

Miss Ailie's needles, busied upon never-finished knitting, flicked out radiant bits of obliquely blazing sunlight that slanted through the open gallery door to which her back was turned. They drew Jane's glance, now and again, from the view of the garden and the tall pines beyond the clearing, framed like a painting in the broad doorway. Often, in the late afternoon, she sat with her face turned to that picture, watching the narrow opening between the great trees where the lane broke through their battle-front.

“It's far past time for Davie to be home.” Miss Ailie marked the height of the sun on the other wall with an eye shrewdly tilted above its steel-rimmed lens. “I'll be fine and glad when the last car's sped. The work grows over-heavy even for a broad-backed body. There's whiles when I'd be blithe to see a poorer crop, now that the banks are paid and there's no need for Davie to fret for his pine-sticks yonder.”

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Jane shook her head. "He'll never get enough of it. He's happiest in the rush of shipping time—it isn't work or worry, to him—it's just another triumph, every year, another proof that at least his faith in his sandhills and his trees wasn't one of MacIvor's follies."

Miss Drummond's wise old eyes slanted again above the glasses.

"You've guessed that there were folk who gave you the name, then?" Her lips twisted to their crooked smile. "Whiles, just at the first of it, I thought, myself—" her voice changed suddenly as Jane would have interrupted—"no, never that it was folly for Davie, but that maybe, for a lassie like you—"

"I know." Jane spoke slowly. "I haven't your gift—and Davie's—of making people see straight through me. I'll never have it; I was carefully trained not to feel anything deeply and to hide even a shallow feeling as if I ought to be ashamed of it. Even after almost a year, I doubt if—if Davie knows how I—"

She stopped, as she always stopped in the midst of what she did or said when the big, rawboned white horse came to the edge of the woods and she

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saw MacIvor, straight and strong and quiet in the saddle. She heard Miss Ailie's thin, dry laugh.

"I'll see to supper, Jane. Davie'll be looking for you in the gallery."

"You couldn't possibly have heard him! You always seem to know the very instant when he comes in sight. I've tried, but I never know unless I'm looking. You—"

Miss Ailie touched her hand.

"I couldn't hear him comin', nor see him, neither, but I could see your eyes, Jane!"

"Is it so plain, then?" said Jane. "I'm glad."

(1)

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